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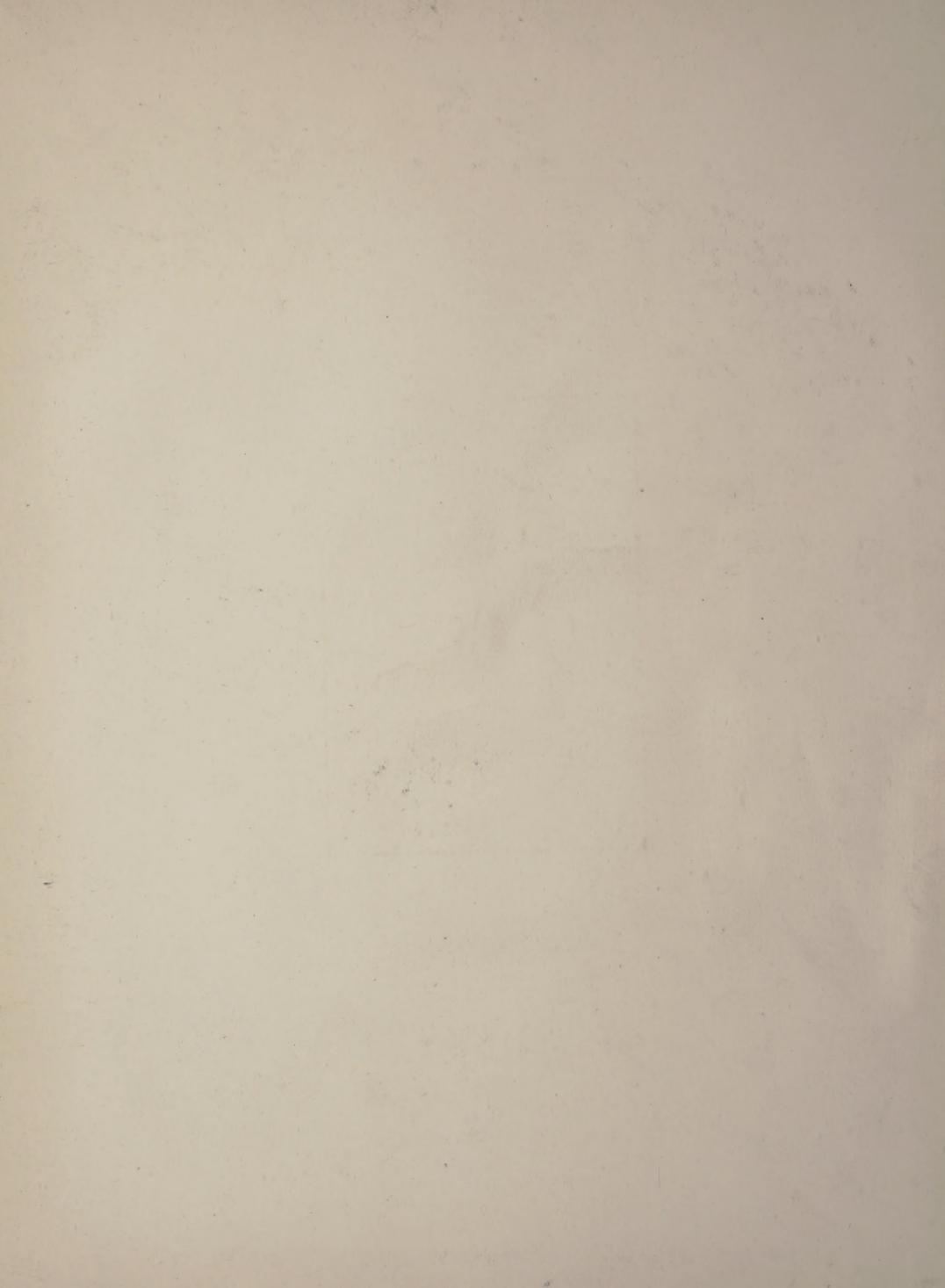
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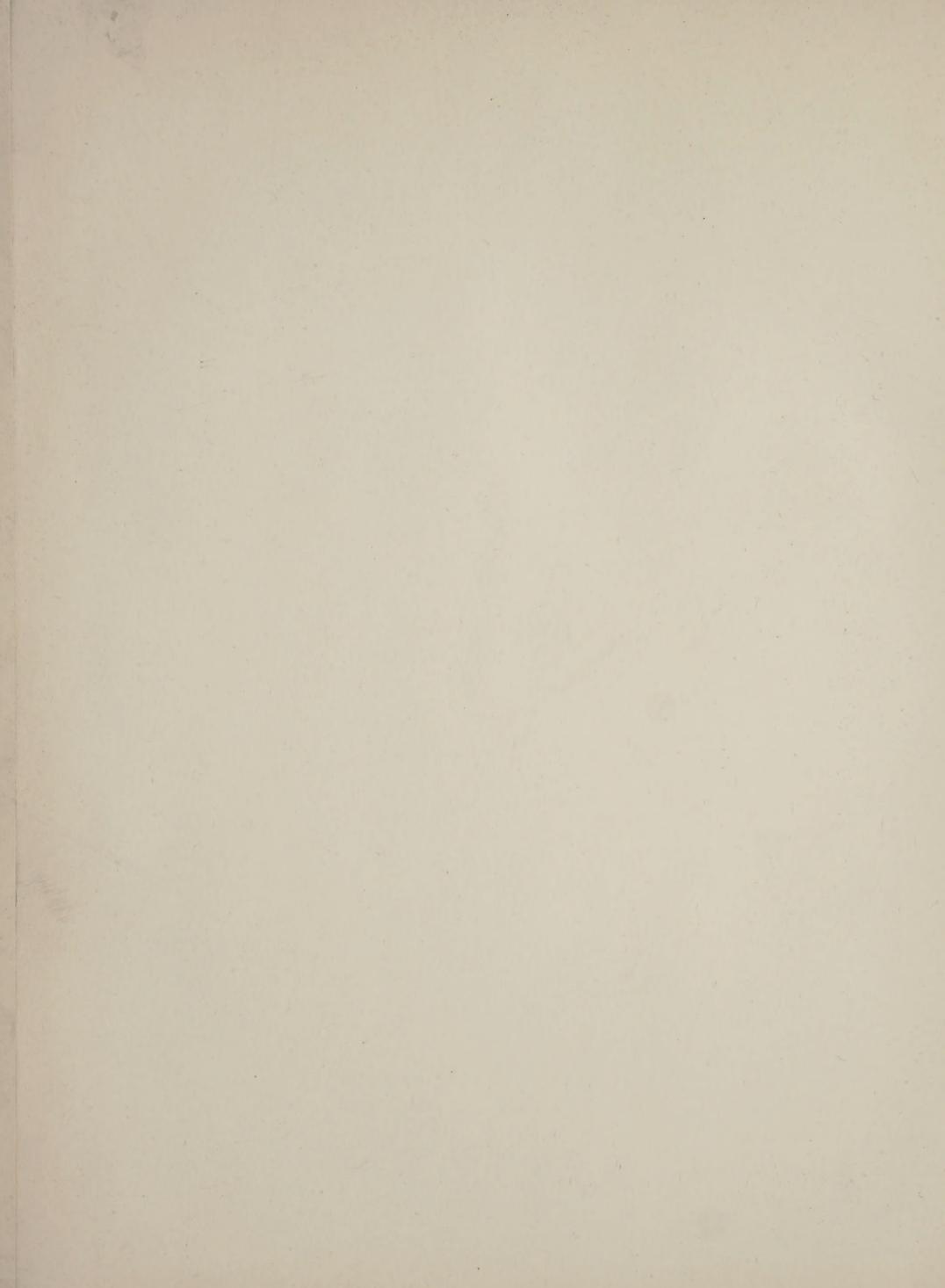
The Horn of Oberon

BY KATHARINE ELISE CHAPMAN

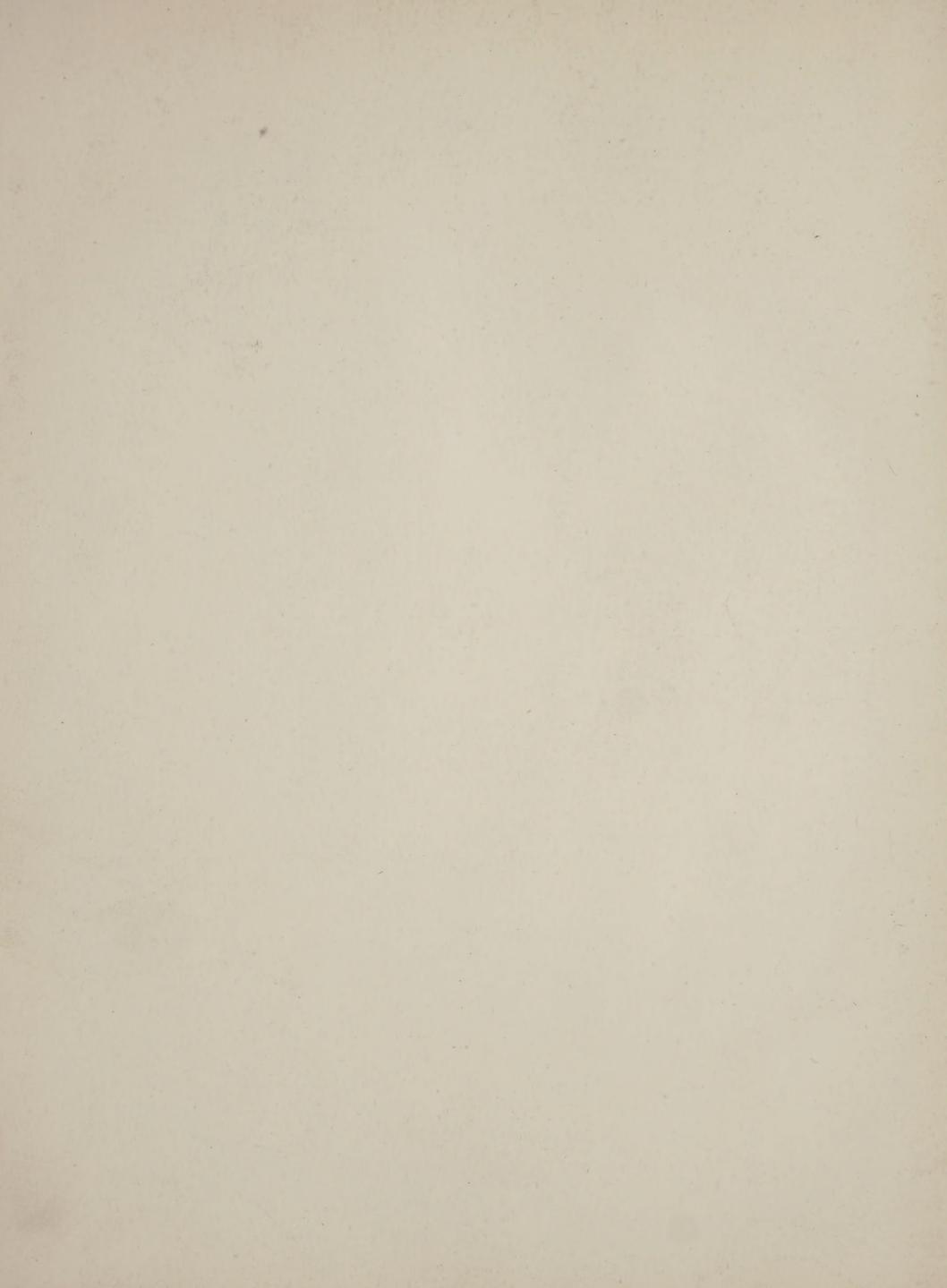
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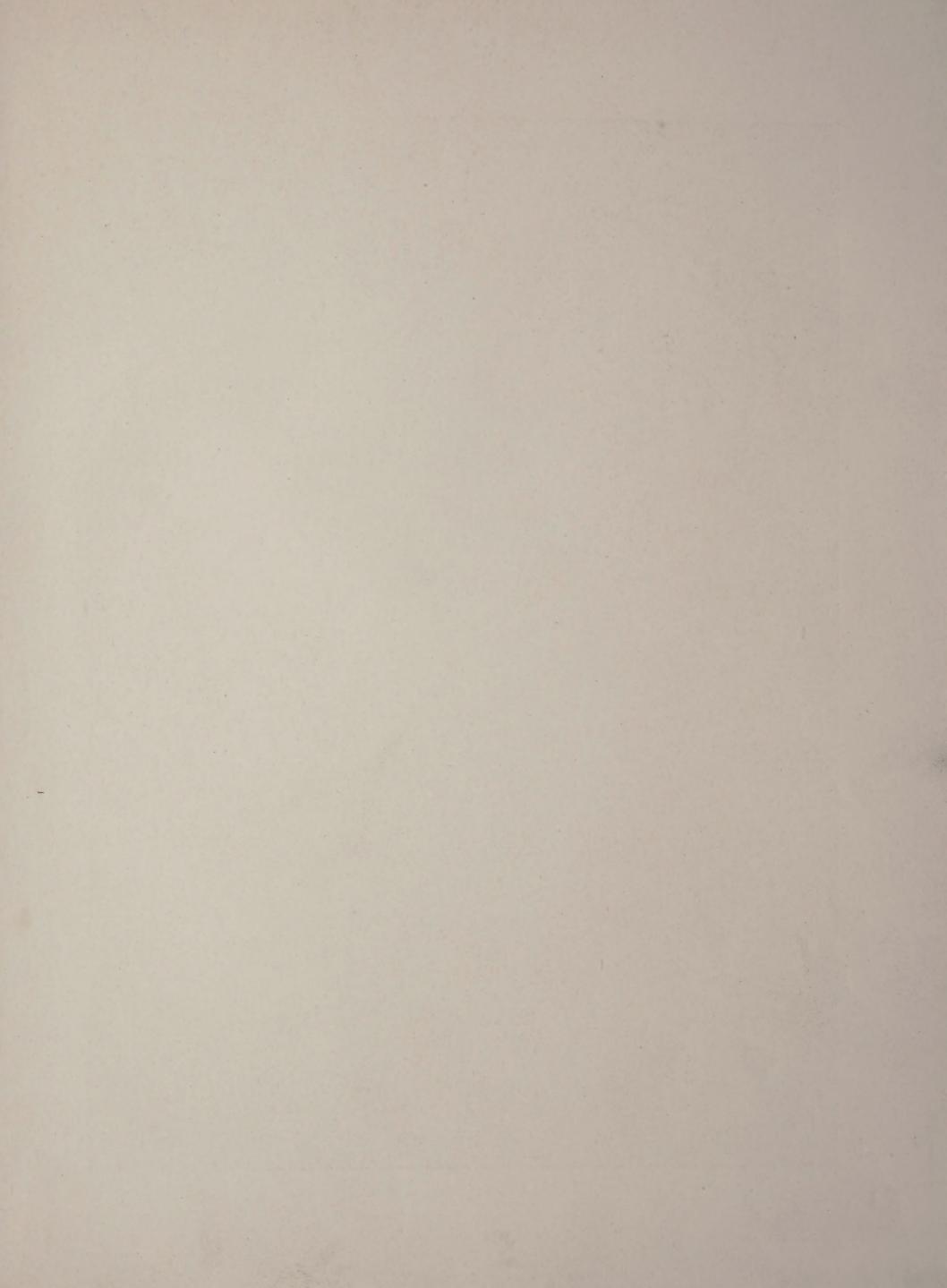
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A Fairy Night's Dream







THE HORN OF OBERON

# A FAIRY NIGHT'S DREAM

OR

# THE HORN OF OBERON

BY
KATHARINE
ELISE
CHAPMAN



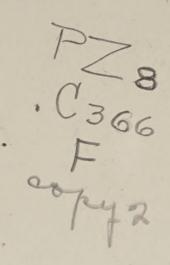
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"Wouldst see Titania, Queen of Fairyland? Then go with Stella Rosa, hand in hand."

CHICAGO
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### DEDICATION

ONCE upon a time, two little girls lived side by side, who, so mild the one, so full of buoyant life the other, might have been named "Starlight" and "Sunbeam"; and they loved and clung to each other, just as sunbeam and starlight clasp hands

as sunbeam and starlight clasp had across the west at evening.

They loved fairy tales, too, and would beg for one, and then another, and yet another; so that I promised to sometime dedicate to them a story.

But one day, Sunbeam glided

away from us at her Savior's call; and she went gladly, for where He lives is the home of sunbeams, and it was fitting that she should dwell within the radiance which streams from His light-crowned head.

After she left us I could never forget the promise I had made to Sunbeam, shining away there beyond the stars, nor to Starlight, who still lingers, the gentle brightness of an earthly home. It is, then, with the joy of long-deferred fulfilment that I dedicate these pages to

BESSIE AND PAULINE.



•

## The Fairy Who Told the Tale

ON the wall of a Grand Ducal palace in Europe is painted a curious picture. Oberon, king of the fairies, has stolen into a convent, and with round wind-puffed cheeks, is blowing upon his magic horn, while the nuns with their mother superior, the stout solemn-looking friars, the market women with their baskets—in short, all within hearing are dancing, dancing away to the tune of his piping, whether they will or no. I was reading about this famous fresco one night alone in my chamber—for Sylvia and Little Buttons were snugly tucked under their coverlets and asleep—and I said to myself as I nestled under my coverlet:

"Oh, if I had Oberon's horn here to set this sleepy old town a-dancing! there's Mrs. Dowager and her colored coachman, Joe, and Dr. Saintlyman and Mr. Pennywise and all the other oddities—a fine stirring-up the fairy music would give them, ha, ha!—and the cats, canaries and parrots should all be there to see!"

Just as I was falling into a dream, which was like a whirligig, click! went the handle of my chamber door.

"Who's this?" I thought in amazement.

"Who's this?" said a fine sharp voice, like an echo to my thought. "You want to know who I am, do you? well, perhaps, I'll tell you, and then, again, perhaps I won't. It depends upon you."

The fire-light flashing from the grate revealed to my astonished eyes the figure of a quaint little old woman whom I cannot better describe as she appeared in the fitful glimmer, than as a long and sharp exclamation point upside down. You might have imagined that she had come to put a point to my exclamations of the moment before. I was indignant that she should walk into my room without knocking—I was curious. For several minutes I

lay gazing at her, speechless. Meanwhile, the point of her tall peaked hat threatened to pierce me as she nodded it toward me with great vigor. She continued:

"So you think all your good neighbors need a dance to the

fairy horn, do you? What about yourself?"

"About me!" I exclaimed, raising myself on my elbow; "who are you, pray, that you enter my room without leave, and then cap the climax of impudence by reading my very thoughts? Why should I dance to Oberon's horn, pray?"

"One question at a time, please," she calmly replied, jamming the end of the pointed staff she carried into the floor until it stood upright, "and I'll answer in the same way. The first

question was, 'Who are you?'

"I will tell you, although you don't deserve it, for you might have guessed it before;—well, I'm a fairy."

I almost gasped in amazement. "I—I don't believe it," I exclaimed. "Fairies never come into rooms through doors; they always enter by the keyhole, or the wall, or the chimney, or something!"

"Fairies come in just how and where they please!" she answered with asperity, "and I chose to come in through the door. Don't put me out of patience with senseless remarks after the long journey I have made this evening just for your benefit. Now, as to your second question; well! if it hadn't been for your oddities, do you think I would ever have taken the trouble to leave my warm chimney-nook to-night, deep down in one of the craters of the moon, and risk getting the asthma, I am not so young as I was once, to tell you a story? No! only because it is droll enough to suit you, and to set you telling it again and again!"

Her not-to-be-contradicted air, and the sharply decisive snap with which each word was cut off—like the clip of scissors to the thread of her conversation—gave me a shame-faced sense of my defects, such as I had never known before. I replied in a rather beseeching tone:

"I beg pardon, Madam Fairy, for having offended your mightiness; but not knowing of your visit beforehand, I could not be aware that you were a personage of such importance. Please excuse my mistake."

"You may call me Mikterenos, if you wish," she replied in a mollified tone, "for that is the name I went by when I lived in these regions. Now, as to the story; but first, I must stir that fire; I'm used to a warm crater, and the chilly night air of this planet makes me a little wheezy."

With these words she rose, and clicking along on her high-heeled slippers to the fire-place, plunged her staff into the smoldering coals. I was amazed to see the flames instantly blaze and roar, leap and sparkle, with a great rush up the chimney. Then they began to send out radiant lashes of varied color and an ardent glow to every part of the room. I seemed plunged in a rainbow furnace which wafted a delightful warmth to both heart and brain. Soon the leaping flames began to take indistinct forms which came and went in a mad whirl like little sprites a-dancing. The fairy Mikterenos crouched on the floor in the glow, talking to herself, as if she had forgotten my presence.

"Yes, King Oberon and Queen Titania are getting old and childish. They like to have their youthful pranks told again to mortals. Oberon himself talked to the great wizard, Shakespeare, one night, so that the world never forgot the tale. He would not stoop to visit *this* weakling "—with a sidewise motion of the head toward me—"but he was quite willing for me to come. Yes, he is getting old."

Still the fairy fire-dance went on, and the forms grew more distinct. The old woman resumed her muttering.

"He knows the story will be forgotten if we go away upon our long journey without telling it to some mortal in sympathy with us—and so few are left to lend us an ear; even Shakespeare listened and laughed but once—and one other caught a few whispers from the horn—But they despise and forget us now; yes, it is time." The rainbow furnace glowed and reddened with friendly and roseate warmth. The old fairy at last lifted her head and smiled; and as she smiled, her face grew like those dancing figures which came and went, went and came. She was young again in spirit, and threading the airy dance with the rest of the merry crew. An air of triumph and power suffused her frame, and she bowed toward the whirling figures.

"Yes, my king, I can tell it now; tell it as I saw it in those dewy nights of mirth and pleasantry. The world shall not altogether forget THE HORN OF OBERON."





Flight was a slender fairy with light downy wings. All fairies do not have wings, although they travel with great lightness and speed without them. Wings were a mark of distinction, and Flight had the swiftest pair in all Titania's court. So when letters or messages were to be carried from one part of the earth to the other, Flight carried them in a pouch of silken gauze, suspended from his neck. Into this pouch he now tucked Queen Titania's letter, carefully spread his gauzy wings, and away he flew.

Far away, in a lovely village through which pebbly brooks purled and murmured amid flower gardens, Stella Rosa lived with her mother. On this warm sunny afternoon in early June, the mother was sitting at her open window, trimming a hat for her darling girl. The shrill sound of voices reached her from the village street, the voices of girls with excitement in the tones. Then Stella Rosa's voice rose above the rest:

"Adrietta must not say unkind things to you, little Miette, she *must* not!" and Stella Rosa's little foot went down hard upon the gravel. "Miette shall come home with me, and my mamma shall give her some of my prettiest gowns—I know she will, and then you will not laugh at her any more, will you, girls? Come, dear Adrietta, let us all be friends together and play with little Miette, won't you, Addie?"

"Ho, ho? so Stella Rosa keeps company with beggars, does she?" cried Adrietta. "Come, girls, we needn't play with these two any longer; let's go to the pear tree and keep house with our dolls by ourselves. My mother doesn't want me to play with beggars."

A gentle voice half choked with tears replied—

"I am not a beggar, Adrietta, if my mamma is poor. I will go home and stay—nobody wants me here," and a burst of tears followed.

"Now, Miette, dear Miette, you must not say so while I am here," broke in Stella Rosa, drawing the weeping child away. "I want you; come, we'll play together, and you shall have my

largest doll! I'll ask my mamma to let you have it two hours every day—yes, three hours!" and Stella Rosa, hurrying with excitement, drew Miette toward her mother, sitting at the open window.

But before the girls had reached the gate, a strange thing happened to Stella Rosa's mother. Through the open window flew suddenly what seemed a white bird, and fluttered into her lap.

Now, so many strange and startling things had happened to Stella Rosa's mother since the day, long ago, when, a girl of sixteen, she was walking through the forest, that she had almost forgotten how to be astonished. On that far-off day she had met the fairy queen; and Titania, who must needs have a mortal near her to cherish, to fondle and to command, had chosen the peasant girl for her love. From that time a strange friendship had bound together the beautiful girl and the fairy queen. On Titania's side it had shown itself in many ways; but although Stella Rosa's mother loved Titania, she trembled lest sometime she might offend her freakish majesty; yet Titania was still as loving as at first, and from time to time sent her messages and splendid gifts. So now, while she was a little startled, she was not greatly surprised when she picked from her lap Titania's dainty letter.

Of course, every well-instructed girl or boy knows that to be the godchild of a fairy in those days was rare good fortune for any mortal. Even the very kitchen maids of Fairyland, the servants who distilled the honey and prepared it for the delicate eating of their queen, could touch a baby so that ever after, its breath should be perfumed with the sweetest essence of flowers. But to have the fairy queen herself for sponsor,—that supreme good fortune was reserved for one happy girl alone, and her name was Stella Rosa, the daughter of Titania's loved friend. You may call to mind all the graces of the whole "rosebud garden of girls," and be sure, Stella Rosa had them, and along with them, many special beauties and sweetnesses of her own. So Titania had decreed, when, for love of Stella Rosa's mother, she had come in her fairy coach that day thirteen years before, to Stella Rosa's christening.

But besides these, Stella Rosa possessed gifts and graces of the

heart, such as it was beyond the power of Titania to bestow. Even better than beauty and grace was the sweet cheerful temper of the lively girl, and her kind unselfish heart. All her little world loved Stella Rosa. Every cat and dog would creep to her side, or follow her along the street, sure of a caress and a gentle word. Each little child knew her voice and held out its arms in welcome when she appeared. But more than others, it was the poor and friendless who found in Stella Rosa first of all a friend.

Just a week before, Miette's mother had come, a stranger, to the village, bringing with her for companion only her little girl. She took possession of a small cottage, which in a few days began to shine with cleanliness and to bloom like a garden. Here she plied her trade of basket-weaver, while Miette, in plain garments of neatest make, went to the village school. When the inquisitive girls asked her name and her mother's, she would reply:

"Why, Mother Gertrude, to be sure, is my mamma's name,

just Mother Gertrude; and I am Little Miette."

Some of the girls, led by Adrietta, the rich merchant's daughter, held aloof, but Stella Rosa, as we have seen, became at once the ardent champion of the gentle child.

And now, as she hurried shrinking Miette up the walk to the cottage door, she said:

"Come, dear Miette, you need not be afraid of my mamma! she'll love you and be kinder to you than I can be,—you'll see!"

All this time the white letter had been lying in the mother's hand, unopened. Stella Rosa burst in, drawing along with her the timid, heart-sore child.

"See, mamma, here is Miette, and I love her very much, and won't you love her too, and give her my best doll to play with? We are going to be the dearest of friends and play together all alone, because the other girls are angry with us"—and so she was rattling on, when her mother stopped her.

"So this is Miette?" she said, stooping and kissing the child upon the forehead. "Now go, noisy little daughter, and bring the best doll from the highest drawer in the dresser; you and Miette may play together while I read this letter, which has just been brought to me by special messenger."

Stella Rosa skipped away, making Miette keep step by her side. It was Stella Rosa's christening day, and as the mother opened the letter, a pang shot through her. She knew it was sent to claim a promise made to the fairy queen thirteen years before, which she must now fulfill.

When she called the girls back, Miette was prattling like a bird.

"Stella Rosa, my dear daughter, I do not want to spoil your pleasure with little Miette, but you will have other playmates and other pleasures for awhile."

Stella Rosa, surprised at her mother's words and tone, looked into her eyes, and saw something gleaming there like tears. Her mother picked up the letter and read it aloud.

"It is now thirteen years since at your daughter's christening I bestowed upon her all the gifts which the power of Titania could grant to a mortal. In return, I charge you to commit awhile to my care this girl whom I long to see. Beautiful she must surely be, and graceful, with every witching charm of glance and smile, and changing rose color—with eyes whose shade I stole from a dimpling summer lake under the moon. Why should I not delight myself awhile with the sweetness I have created? She shall be happy, I promise you, and I will restore her to you more blooming in beauty than before. A coach will follow the messenger soon, to bring her to my fairy palace. Farewell, my friend.

TITANIA."

Is it strange that for a little while, Stella Rosa forgot Miette, her mother, everything else, in the ardor of her surprise and joy? She danced with graceful motions about the room, sometimes throwing her arms around Miette and hurrying her along in her vigorous and excited whirls, sometimes dropping on her knees at her mother's side and kissing her cheek and hands, lost in the delight and wonder of the future so suddenly opening up before

her. At last she was to see the fairy queen! to actually live in the midst of wonders of which she had only dreamed! It was no secret to her that Titania, for the love of her mother, had come to her christening, like the right royal little lady that she was, with a coach and six, and a scepter, with which the queen had touched her baby self at the church door.

But by this time you may be asking—if Stella Rosa was thus favored, why did she live in a cottage? Why, if Titania was so powerful, did she not give to her darling a palace with troops of

servants, gowns of lace, jewels and dishes of gold?

Ah, but Titania knew better than that! the fairy queen knew that no happier place could be found for her favorite's childhood than that pretty cottage embowered in its trees. No lace and satin could make a girl's room look sweeter than those white hangings to Stella Rosa's dainty couch, that muslin at the window. Troops of servants could not do more for her than her old nurse, nor keep her neater in looks than her own hands and her mother's loving care. Happy Stella Rosa was not yet wearied of rich and beautiful things before she was thirteen; she could still look forward to new wonders; and now had come this blissful surprise, this crowning fulfilment of all her childish dreams!

No wonder that at her mother's bidding, she flew to prepare for her journey; to bring her best white frocks, the crimson silk which was her finest gown, her silk pelisse, and the bright morocco gaiters! no wonder that her hands trembled with eagerness as she prepared to tie the new gipsy hat over her dark curls!

But just then a suppressed sob called her thoughts back from Fairyland. Little Miette, finding herself neglected and forgotten, had shrunk away into the darkest corner, and was softly weeping because her newly-gained, her only friend was so soon deserting her. Stella Rosa sprang to her side.

"Miette! little Mouse! dear Miette, do you cry because I am going to leave you?"

"I cry because you have forgotten me," sobbed Miette. Stella Rosa's tender conscience reproached her at once. "Come, Miette, it was only for one moment that I forgot you; please forgive me! I'm sorry I was so selfish—but indeed, you don't know how I have longed to see the queen of Fairies! Come with me to mamma; she will love you while I am gone."

But when she drew Miette to her mother, and saw within her mother's eyes the tears which could not be concealed, her heart failed her. Throwing her arms around her mother's neck she sobbed aloud.

"Dear mamma, I will soon return, never fear! Indeed, I will not go at all if you grieve so. The queen can be content without me. She has a whole kingdom of her own, with troops of fairies, and you have only poor little me—oh, yes, and now Miette!"

"Hush, my daughter! do not make her angry by your hasty words. When Titania commands, we must obey. But will my

little girl forget her mother amid all those wonders?"

"Oh, mamma!—but indeed, you could not have meant it; your Stella Rosa forget you?" she sobbed again, and then dried her eyes to smile upon her mother. "I'll come hurrying back like the west wind some day when you least expect it, and bring you a prize from Fairyland—you'll see!"

"Bring me yourself, daughter, for that will be the best gift of

all."

"And oh, mamma, here is Miette, my little Mouse! Won't you let her fill my place while I am gone?"

"Yes, dear, Miette shall be like a daughter to me for my daughter's sake. You'll be rich in mothers, wont you, little Miette?"

Miette looked too shyly happy for words as Stella Rosa went on:

"And some of my frocks, mamma, will almost fit Miette; and please let her play with my best doll every day. I shan't need it now, shall I, mamma?"

While they were still talking a new wonder made its appearance in the village street. It was nothing less than the coach, sent by Titania, to carry Stella Rosa to Fairyland. As it drew up at the gate, it was surrounded by an eager crowd of curious gazers. All the boys of the village school were there, of course; and unfriendly Adrietta, with the few girls who had followed her to

the pear tree, looked on with wondering and curious eyes. haps you are thinking that this coach was a mere phantasm after all--a hollow pumpkin, perhaps, lined with mullein leaves, and drawn by beetles or mice! In fact, Adrietta, when told it was a fairy coach, did declare that in her opinion it was a make-believe. But if you have any such idea, it shall at once be corrected. That coach of Cinderella's, which is the only fairy coach you know of, was only a make-believe, it is true; and the fairy godmother couldn't make believe after midnight, for she was one of the twelve o'clock fairies, who have no power after that hour. This coach of Stella Rosa's was a real fairy coach, just as Titania was a real fairy and the reigning queen. For how could Stella Rosa, who was a well-grown girl, get into such a vehicle as that of Cinderella's without crushing the whole carriage under her and sitting down in the midst of broken pumpkin and flattened beetles? Your Lillie couldn't, nor your Sylvia, and they are just turned thirteen. What do you say? The fairy queen could have made it seem right? Yes, she could, but she did not need to. No, Titania has been much misunderstood, and it is for me, Mikterenos, to set the world right on this point. She had more riches than the queen of Crim Tartary, and she had well provided for her favorite. The coach was a real one, small, to be sure, and dainty, lined with the very latest shade of olive-green satin, and drawn by the dearest little black ponies, with just enough of room in it for Stella Rosa to sit in comfort. The coachman was dressed in light green and gold, and by the twinkle of his saucy eyes, I should have known him to be Pugpippin, one of Titania's pranksome followers.

Once in the coach, which she entered with a few tears through which gleamed a look of delight, the ponies flew swiftly along, with Stella Rosa behind them wrapped in such absorbing thoughts that presto! before she could realize that she was fairly on her journey, she was at the court of the fairy queen; and there was Titania herself, who, in a voice like many fine bells, exclaimed:

"Welcome, my darling, to your godmother's home!" and then she was surrounded by fairies singing, dancing and leading her toward the palace of Titania, which glistened in the last rays of the setting sun.

Titania's palace, set in the midst of small gardens, was of spun glass interwoven and twisted together in countless hues. Here, in a bower of beauty, was to be for the present Stella Rosa's home.

From this time on, the whole court was kept agog with excitement, inventing games and planning surprises for her enjoyment. Now, it was a stereopticon exhibition (you need not look so scornful, for the magic lantern was then unknown among mortals, and of course it was a wonder and delight to Stella Rosa); then a Punch and Judy sent her into spasms of laughter. What do you say? (Punch known for ever so long, and old as the hills)? I have lived long enough to know that Nimblewit invented it at that time to please Stella Rosa;—and oh! the wonderful array of talking dolls and self-skipping ropes, and grace-hoops which flew for Stella Rosa of their own accord! and the first bicycle of the world! Titania's goddaughter ought to have been, and was, a very happy girl.

Then she was allowed to see the maids prepare the honey in the queen's kitchen (she and Titania ate bread and honey there every day), and watch the fairy laborers gather the hay for Titania's horses. But perhaps her greatest delight was to ramble through the flower-gardens, which stretched far out of sight, in three directions from the palace. Titania, by right as queen of Fairyland, received tribute from the whole world of flower-fairies. From all around the world, each flower sent a legate to her court. When the fairy came she brought with her her own pretty house, the flower she most loved, and Titania gave it a place in her grounds. Thus it was that Stella Rosa wandered daily through botanical gardens that would have brought tears of delight to the eyes of a savant, if such creatures had lived in that simple fairy age.

But the fourth garden, the one behind the palace, was to Stella Rosa a delight too deep for words. Here were few flowers, it is true, but in their place were many fountains. And the strange and beautiful part of it was that the fountains were themselves huge and gorgeous plants, blooming ever anew in sparkling water.

Some tossed up their spray in the shape of great rose trees, which ever and anon burst into huge water roses, pink or crimson or yellow. Others were like chrysanthemums, palms or ferns. Rising highest of all was a great lily fountain, in the middle of the garden, spreading wide on every side in crystal lilies, and over it hung a rainbow which never faded, but grew more soft and dreamlike in the moonlit nights. All the fountains were scented, too, like the flowers they stood for, so that when Stella Rosa walked amid the fountains, her garments caught the fragrance from the flying spray. Wonderful birds splashed and played all day around the alabaster basins and sang as if they would sing themselves to death for joy of the fountain music.

And was not Stella Rosa happy? When Queen Titania would

ask her each day, she at first freely replied:

"Yes, indeed, very, very happy, dear Godmother!"

And so for awhile, all went well.

But yet—but yet—if she could only have had dear mamma there to enjoy all these delights with her! And not only mamma, but little Miette and her schoolmates and the poor lame old man and his dog Ranger; but no, it would never do to have Ranger there crashing about the spun-glass palace and crushing the fairy flowers. If she could but just pat him on the head for a moment, or take "Fluff," the kitten, in her arms!

At last, Titania was obliged to confess that she sometimes saw a weary look cross her goddaughter's face, which told her that Stella Rosa would fain steal away from all this gaiety to nestle for awhile in her mother's arms. Then it was that Titania conjured up in her wilful mind a new project, little thinking that the Land of Fairy was to be shaken to its center with such a commotion as had never been known in that kingdom; two people were to be made happy who had been sorrowful; one unlucky wight would be made sorrowful—for a night; and more than all, King Oberon and Queen Titantia, who had quarreled, would at last kiss and make up, and live happy ever after, which is the only sensible thing for any one to do either in Fairyland or Everyday Land.



### CHAPTER II

Enter now the magic Horn—
But hist! away!
Should Oberon find you ere the morn,
You'll rue the day.

NOW you must know that his Royal and ever lofty Mightiness, King Oberon, valued his fairy horn almost more than his Majesty's own saucy, up-tilted nose. He had nothing else which gave half the merriment to himself and his jolly crew that this cunning bugle could bring. You see, it had the power of starting an unexpected dance from the severest people in the most unlikely places. that was not all. It could mislead and bewilder mortals when they were peacefully pursuing their ways, and when it had made them thoroughly frightened and angry, it could restore them to good-nature. Why, one blast of the tiny thing was so blithe and laughter-exciting, that it was enough to set anybody's feet tripping for the rest of the day. Oh, there was no end to the pranks it had played, I promise you! Would you know from whence had come its magic power, and how Oberon came by it?

The Mirth-King could have told you, or the Mirth-King's hereditary grand armorer. It was he who whispered the secret to me.

That high official, the armorer, had never had anything to do, because the Mirth-King, who was first cousin to King Oberon, never went to war, and needed armor no more than he needed the moon. He kept an armorer, to be sure, and other officers, for the sake of his royal dignity, which I am sorry to say was upset every day by his mad pranks. As to the armorer, day after day, he lighted his forge and kept the hammer lying on the anvil for the sake of his dignity. But being one of those great souls who long to make the world happier, he was always looking about for something to do which was really worth his while.

And one day he found it. It came to him while he was rambling through the Talking Wood. Right next to the wood was a grassy shaded field, so inviting that every joyous creature was mad to romp in it as soon as he saw it. At night, the mirth-fairies sported there. With dawn, came the nymphs and dryads, chased by the mischievous fauns. A little later, when the sun was bright, the squirrels chattered and frisked there, and the young foxes capered over the grass. But the very spirit of the place broke loose completely only in the afternoon, when the children, freed from school, scampered with shouts and laughter about the happy meadow.

They were playing there that day while the armorer was in the Talking Wood. As the ears of the armorer were perfectly deaf, he heard with his eyes. While he looked about him, the children's shouts and laughter were blown to him by the breeze, and he saw them falling around him in a fine shower of silver and gold dust. Happier than a king, he carefully gathered together all the powder he could find, and carried it away to his forge room. Again and again he returned, each time departing with a treasure. Sometimes it was the diamond dust scattered by the mirth-fairies' laughter; or, most precious element of all, the flying crystals of rainbow color from the pipes that played for the happy dancers. The lark's song, the squirrel's chatter, the lamb's contented bleat, and all happy and care-free voices each gave its portion to the good armorer's store. When he had gathered enough of the precious crystals, he shut himself in his forge room, and did not come out for a year and a day. The Mirth-King visited him there each week, and passers-by could hear bursts of laughter which nearly sent every one in the kingdom mad with eagerness to join in the fun.

But at last the king appeared with a tiny horn, engraved with laughing faces, and made up of all the jolliest, merriest and most innocent things which the world ever saw.

One day, the Mirth-King went away upon a long journey. This was many moonlit nights before the other fairies left the earth; and for fear mirth and laughter should be forgotten, he gave the horn to Oberon, his old-time crony, so that he might keep the child-heart beating in the world. He did not know that it needed both the king and the queen of the fairies to use the horn at its best; for while Oberon was frolicsome, Titania was fond and loving, and both frolic and love are needed to keep the child-heart beating. But Oberon would not have parted with it for anything less than his own ransom; so he piped and piped, and the world danced and laughed, and he led it where he would.

Now Titania had never quite forgiven Oberon for the unfair way in which he had won from her the little changeling boy, the account of which you have read in the great wizard's book. At first she had laughed, not knowing all the trick; but when she found that Oberon had not only won her petted boy, but had made her absurd in the eyes of all Fairyland, she was wild with grief and shame. Then it was that she fled to her own sweet palace, and with Eglantine, her dearest lady, and half the fairies of the

kingdom, tried to forget her teasing Oberon. Truth to tell, her going was a relief to the careless-natured king, who, although he might quarrel, really loved only his sports.

Titania had long hoped to gain from him a prize of his own. And now when all other means of pleasing Stella Rosa had been

exhausted, she bethought herself of the wonderful horn.

"The horn! the horn! what is there in Fairyland which will delight Stella Rosa like this? By fair means or foul, I must get it from him!"

She first tried entreaties. To make them resistless, if possible, she arrayed herself in smiles (but did not neglect to wear the latest thing in court styles, which was also extremely becoming), and went to call upon her lord.

No one upon earth but Oberon himself could have withstood the charm of her manner, as she begged him to forget past disputes.

"Fair lord and husband, I know that I have resisted your royal will, and have sought my own pleasure and asserted my own power and rights. This I know is contrary to wifely duty, for I should have found my happiness only in pleasing you."

Oberon, naturally delighted to hear his wife speak in a man-

ner so correct and dutiful, replied by compliments.

"Lovely Titania, it suits me right well to hear you speak so humbly to me, your master and king. I must say, I never saw you more charming than now. You really are not faded at all, as I have sometimes fancied, but are quite as fresh and piquant as when I chose you out of all Fairyland for my bride. To show you my favor, I will at once settle a pension on your court dress-maker."

"Dear lord and master," said Titania, sinking gracefully upon an ottoman at his feet, and looking into his face with clasped hands and a ravishing smile, "your gracious offer—so like your thoughtfulness!—makes me feel that all is at last forgotten which stood between us. The court dress-maker I provided for yesterday, because she made so charming the robe which

I had chosen to please my lord; and now, I know you will not refuse me some other token of our re-union."

"Charming Titania, what would you have? shall I send a diamond-dew necklace to each of your maids? I feel very complaisant this morning, and if there is any favor which I can rea-

sonably grant, I shall be happy to please you."

"Dear Oberon, I have long admired the power of your curious horn. I have been told that it will restore the sulky and ill-tempered to good-nature, and as some of my attendants need such a remedy, I beg you will grant to your Titania, the one you chose out of all Fairyland for your bride, this pledge of your forgiveness."

Now Oberon had no intention of letting his favorite toy pass out of his hands. So assuming an air of dignity, he replied:

"Really, Titania, I said I would grant anything which was reasonable, but it is quite out of the question for you to expect me to give you a thing I set any value on myself. Name something else."

"Alas, my lord! what can I ask of you but this? Am I not queen of this fair kingdom? Have I not a court of my own, and power to do as I will? Your petty diamonds and pearls I do not care for, when my bower is hung with jewels. But remember, you took from me the only creature I had set my heart upon, and I grieved long; now, a lovely girl dwells in my bower. To please her, I would amuse our idle hours with this charming toy."

"Then you must find another plaything for your dainty godchild. It is not Oberon's wont to give up what pleases him so

well."

"But only for a night, dear Oberon."

"No, you could not buy it of me with your whole rebel crew. I would willingly give you my cast-off slippers of speed or my last year's cap of silence,—for they would soon rid me of your entreaties," he muttered in an undertone.

Titania, finding flattery and prayers in vain, turned her back upon him, called her train and prepared to leave the place in a

pout, when he, bethinking himself of the bugle, had it at his lips in a trice. Its merry blast sent his ill-used lady and her attendants dancing away until they were out of hearing.

This new insult was more than Titania could bear. She flew in a rage to her most secret bower to plot revenge, and called to

her her most trusty followers.

"Such insult no queen ever before received from her consort!" she exclaimed, pacing up and down the hall. "Henceforth, I shall forget all love and duty to Oberon, until I have won from him the horn. Eglantine, lovely sprite, come, walk by my side; and tell me, Sweet, have you no power in Oberon's halls? Have you no friend at court whom you may win to our cause? Think, can Oberon be prevailed upon by any love of yours?"

Eglantine turned a faint rose color throughout her pale, still face, and drooping her head upon her breast, shook it softly. The queen was too intent upon her projects to notice her favorite

fairy's distress.

She turned to her other counsellors.

"You, Flight, and you, Nimblewit and Lightwing, you are all swift and wily. Call to your aid every fairy in the kingdom who will help you. Follow night and day in the track of this heartless king, and seize the horn in an unwary moment. This prize I must obtain to vindicate my queenly dignity."

The delicate creature in her pretty frenzy was a witching thing to look upon. Her robes of airiest green swept about her as if a zephyr were bearing them up, and fanned the air like wings. Through them gleamed a pink glow which suffused the atmos-

phere about her.

Nimblewit, followed by the others, knelt and kissed her hand.

"Do not fear, my queen," he said, "fairy time is long, and Oberon's memory very short. He has entirely forgotten his promise to me of rewarding the service I rendered him not so long ago. I will remind him of it again by another good turn. I'll relieve him of the horn, whose weight must sometimes make him weary."

"Come, comrades, away!" said Flight. "We must not trust too much to Oberon's forgetting our queen's revenge. He is far too shrewd for that, but perchance, by watchfulness, we may find him drowsy or sleeping."

Oberon, as Flight had foreseen, was always on his guard. Night and day, he wore the horn, fastened to a strong but delicate chain about his neck, and was ever followed by Puck, his ancient and most trusty attendant. He chuckled as he observed the sly movements of Titania's men.

"O, ho, she thinks she can trick her Oberon, does she? but Oberon will yet prove more than a match, as he has done before, for his crafty queen!"

After awhile, however, in spite of his boastful words, the king ever so little relaxed his watchfulness.

Finally, midsummer-night drew near, a time dear to fairies. The moon was at its full, and the king and the queen each resolved to celebrate it by long revelry.

Titania longed to please Stella Rosa, and Oberon would not be outdone in anything by his queen. At twilight, Titania, calling home her messengers, prepared to light up her spun-glass palace, and Oberon with his followers whiled the hours away in a forest both deep and wide, which was his favorite haunt.

Titania's palace was lovely in the morning; it was more lovely still in the rays of the setting sun, as Stella Rosa had first seen it; but words to describe it would only spoil the dream of its beauty, when at night Titania's attendants had lit up all its fairy lamps. Then the light reached out in bars of rainbow colors with every shading between, far, far over the grass plats and the gardens, and was reflected again in the fountains, until the birds woke in wonder and delight; far out to the forest itself, the scene of my story, where Oberon was frisking with his crew. The belated mortals who saw it, remarked, "The northern lights are wonder-

ful to-night"; but Oberon only said, "How Titania loves all that glitter! but as for me, give me a bosky dell and a merry dance, and a mortal or two to play my pranks upon!" and went on, capering and romping until dawn.

Dawn came much sooner than he wished, and found him far from his palace. As he was wending his way slowly back, for dawn always made him drowsy, up jumped the sun above the horizon, quite overcoming him with its heat.

"I will lie down and rest in this hidden nook," he said.

But after he was snugly curled up on a pillow of moss, the chain with its dangling horn still felt heavy about his neck.

"Unfasten the horn, good Puck, and lay the chain in my hand; and go, light creature, over the Moon Mountains with a message to the king of the Laughing Goblins. Take this fern leaf to him and tell him to meet me at midnight under the tree of mirth which stands in the midst of the Talking Wood. Ha, ha! won't those grotesque gentlemen dance a merry figure when I blow my horn! now hasten and I will seek refuge here from the only foe who has ever vanquished me."

"Here comes this way a hurrying wind from the western ocean caves. The swiftness of his flight tells me he has speedy business on hand. By your leave, not his, I'll mount his shoulders."

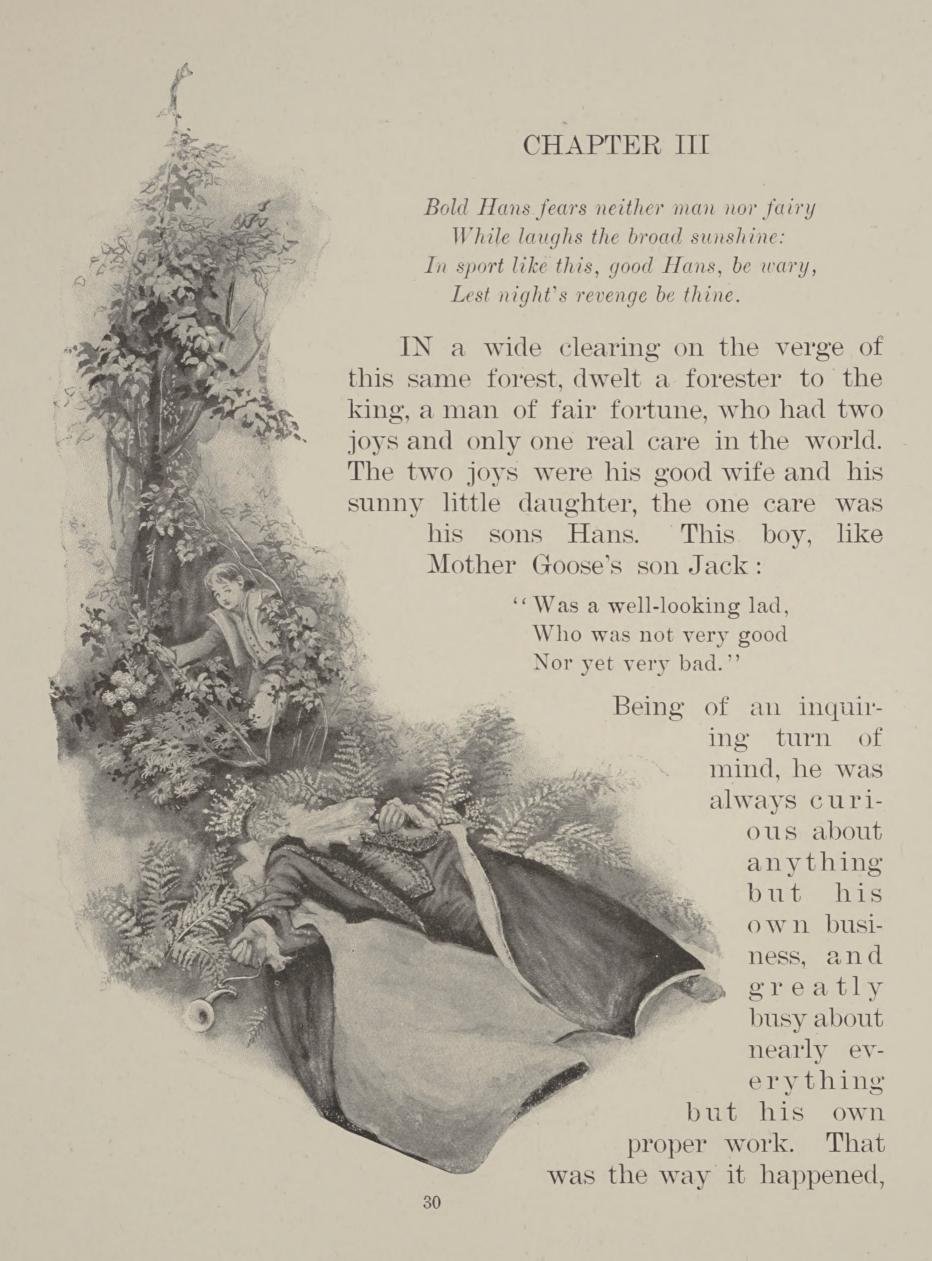
Then as the forest rustled through all its length with the hurrying wind, Puck sprang upon its back and sped away over the Moon Mountains. Oberon nestled closer to the mossy bed, thinking merely to rest for a few idle moments; but alas! as the sun's heat grew greater, his drowsiness overcame him, and he dropped into slumber.

Oh, where is Titania now? where are her watchful spies? If only the smallest and weakest were at hand, the longed-for prize might even now be hers! But Titania, far away, is resting upon a dainty couch in her glistening palace, Stella Rosa by her side, utterly weary, while upon the maiden's white lids two tiny sleep fairies are perching. The court is carelessly sunk in repose; and

at a hundred leagues' distance Oberon sleeps, with the chain already fallen from his half-opened hand.

However, if all Fairyland sleeps at this hour, a mortal is awake who is to have great influence upon the fortunes of several people in this tale, and he now makes his appearance on the scene.





I suppose, that he knew the forest better than any man in it, not excepting his own father. No one so well as he was acquainted with the coverts of the grouse, the nests of the singing birds, the hiding places of the squirrel. The most shy and secret haunts of flower and plant were his familiar resting-places. On this particular morning, having risen before the sun for a ramble, in brushing through the copse, he had startled a young brood of partridges. He followed to see where the beautiful little creatures would hide. Stooping down and peering under where the copse was thickest, he suddenly spied Oberon asleep, and near him the little horn with its delicate chain. Here was a prize for any lad among mortals. Who had ever before found a fairy toy? Quick as lightning he seized the chain, and slipping backward out of the copse, was soon hurrying home as fast as his feet would carry him.

Now if Hans had ever stopped to think at all, he would have pondered seriously during that homeward scramble. If he did not know all about fairies and their habits, as well as their likes and dislikes, it was not the fault of his old nurse nor of the other servants in his father's house. He had been told often enough how the fairies, while they liked to pry into other people's concerns, and make or mar, were much put about if any but their favorites took liberties with them. He ought to have known that it was wrong and dangerous to steal; but that it was more than dangerous to steal fairy things. Heedless Hans was bent only upon his own sport; and if sport he wanted, he was likely to have enough for awhile, at least. When on reaching home, he came up the garden walk, his little round, rosy sister Marie was picking rose-leaves into a paper-bag.

"Look! see here, Marie! I've found a prize for all of us! a fairy horn! Why, I shouldn't wonder if the gold would come tumbling out upon the ground the minute I blow upon it! What do you think of that? Father needn't scold me any more for not minding my books, and idling, as he calls it, through the

forest."

"But Hans, where did you get it?" asked Marie in round-eyed amazement.

"This morning I stuck my head under some thick bushes, and there upon the ground—will you believe me!—was a fairy asleep, and this horn lay by his side. You'll see, it will bring good luck to all of us!"

"Oh, Hans, how dared you be so bold? It may bring evil luck to all of us!" said Marie, in an awe-struck voice. "But then, how do you know it was a fairy? Fairies are never seen in daylight."

"How do I know? I'm not a booby; why, there he lay all dressed in green, and yet you could see through the green, it was so gauzy. I could almost see through him, too, for I caught a glimpse of a leafy branch on the other side of him, dark as in a colored glass. Oh, he was a beauty, I tell you! I did not stop to look, but I know his hair was all yellow-white about his head like a huge crown, and his face was the color of Mother's big pearl, and his cheeks were rosy, and he smiled while he slept."

"Couldn't it have been some nobleman's child lost in the forest?"

"He wasn't a child at all. And what nobleman's son was ever so light and slender that you could almost see through to the moss he lay on? He was more delicate than wax, I tell you, and handsomer than human."

"But I wonder that he let himself be seen."

"So don't I. I believe he let me see him. Maybe he knows me, because I am so much in the wood."

But the surmise of over-confident Hans was wide of the truth. The fact was, his frolicsome Majesty, King Oberon, had, for the first time in his life, been caught napping. He had cast aside his cap of darkness the night before, while he was pranking around, and forgotten to put it on at daylight. He had sent all his train on before him except Puck, when they might have stayed to guard him, and then he had let the sun catch him lingering. The fierce king of day was only too glad to overpower this moon-

shine king, and expose him to any careless eye that might discover his hiding place.

"But you must have offended him now. Perhaps some of the fairies are near us while we are talking," and Marie glanced timidly around her, "and they might bring great misfortune to us because you have taken it."

"Oh, never you fear! girls are always afraid of something! Why, you don't think that gauze-green, waxy little beau could hurt us, do you? I don't believe fairies can hurt a human, anyway,

they're too spare. But just look at this, Marie."

Emboldened by her brother's words, Marie drew nearer. They turned the toy over and over, and laughed at the laughing faces engraved upon it. Hans put it upside down and shook it, but nothing fell out. Then fixing it to his lips, he made a few vain attempts to blow upon it, and at last began to catch the trick of the music.

"Ah, now I've got it; now, Marie, just hold your bag under

while I blow, so that we won't lose any of the gold."

Marie, obedient but trembling with excitement, took her place just in front of him, holding wide the mouth of the bag. Hans began to blow gently. No gold fell out, but Marie felt her feet twitching with an odd desire to dance.

"Marie, keep still, can't you? you'll spill all the gold if you

jump about so."

"But, Hans, no gold has come out yet, and I couldn't help it,"

said Marie, piteously.

"Well now," said Hans, preparing for a greater effort, "I'll blow harder, and you try again to hold the bag right under the horn."

Puffing out his cheeks and puckering his lips, Hans threw back his head and blew and blew.

Ah, how strong, beautiful and clear poured out the fairy notes! Marie tripped merrily up and down the garden walk as Hans blew faster and faster. He looked for a shower of gold, until at last it flashed through his mind what was the secret power of the

horn. As he paused to burst into a roar of laughter, Marie fell breathless upon the sward.

"He, he, he! it was as good as a whole bag of gold to see you jump! ha, ha, ha! Why, the dancing master will have easy work, now, for I'll get you into training with the help of the horn. Oh, you'll see, I'll have rare sport! Never mind, Marie, if we don't get rich, we'll stir up every soul and body within the bounds of this forest, or my name isn't Hans! Here comes Father; I'll try it next on him."

"Hans! how can you?"

But the bugle was already at his lips, and the undutiful boy blew out a blast which sent both his father and Marie tripping around the garden; but the father, whose limbs had not capered so briskly since his boyhood, soon found out the cause of their unwonted antics. The justly angry parent gradually grew nearer to Hans, and watching his chance, gave him a vigorous box on the ear, which stopped the dancing and music together, and sent Hans rolling on the grass.

"You rascal! what elf's prank are you playing on me? Bring me that witch's horn this moment, and take yourself off to your work! This is what comes of your idle freaks and rambles, is it? Come here, or I'll make you dance to another tune that you won't forget for awhile!"

Well it was for Hans that his father's anger was so shortlived, and his heart so easily filled with the magic of the horn. Ere he had finished speaking, the twinkles began to appear in his kindly eyes, and before Hans had reached him, a broad smile spread itself over his face.

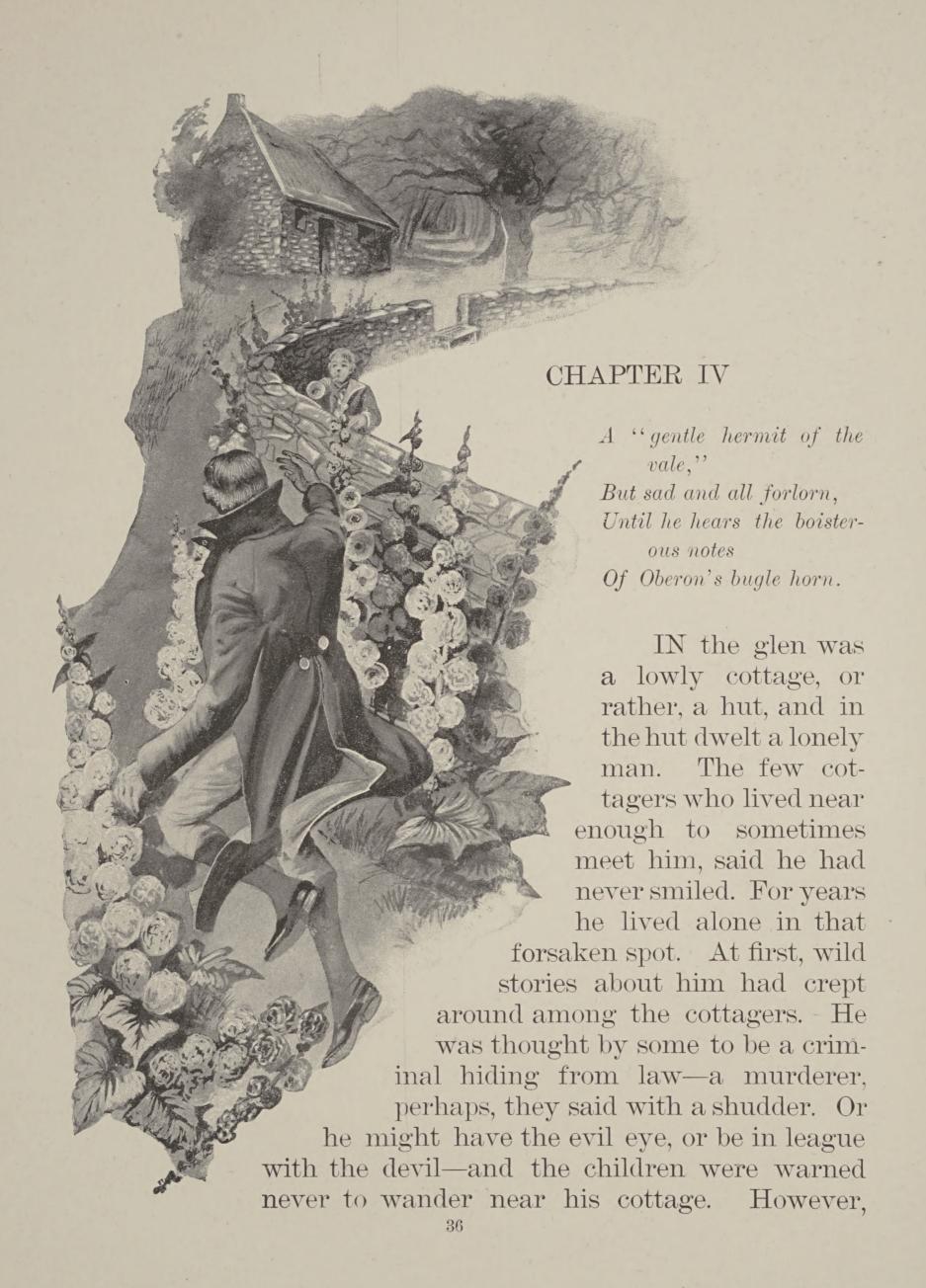
"I found it early this morning, by the side of a sleeping fairy. I thought it would bring us riches, and I didn't know there was fun in it until I saw Marie dance. I'm sorry I made you dance, too, but if you will please not take it away, I'll never blow it anywhere near you again."

"See that you don't, you young rogue; and now be off, take

—Come here, Hans," he continued, as he saw that Hans' eager feet were longing to get away from that hard command—"come here. I cannot permit you to keep this stolen toy. The fairies would vent their rage upon you and upon us all, perhaps. Besides, there would be no more work or study to be had from you, except at the end of a rod. Not a word—go this instant and take it back."

Without waiting for another permission, Hans scampered away. Hardy and active woodman as he was, he soon put miles between himself and his home, plunging ever deeper into the forest. But oh! naughty, disobedient Hans! this is not the way to the copse where you found the fairy horn! did not your father command you to return it, lest evil come upon you? If you could look into the future, how you would hasten to obey him!

Now Hans, like many other children large and small, meant to obey when his father spoke. But after he had hurried awhile through the forest, his pace grew slower; he paused, and a sudden grin widened his saucy face. Then he started on again, almost at a run, until he approached a retired glen in the densest part of the forest.



as time went on, and he showed no desire to blight their crops or to mar their children, they began to feel more kindly toward him.

Finally, one day, a little child strayed from home into the depths of the forest, and was wandering about, crying piteously, when she was met by the hermit. Taking her tenderly in his arms, he left the wood and walked from cottage to cottage, until he found her parents and restored to them their lost darling. From that time, the people were thoroughly won to him, and would have shown him much kindness if he had not withdrawn himself from their attentions. When strangers approached his cottage, he would look at them so sternly that they were glad to turn and go another way. Then he would sigh and shake his head sadly, as if to say:

"No, no! It is not for me!"

During the years which he had spent in the lonely glen, his beard had grown until it hung long over his breast. His face was pale and thin, but the brightness of his eyes gleamed like stars out of a white mist.

Now, when that marplot, Hans, left his father's presence in such haste, he took, as we know, the path which led to the hermit's glen. He had persuaded himself that it would do no harm to try the power of the horn once more before returning it to its owner. As he bounded along through the copses and between the majestic old trees, he did not turn aside, as usual, to chase a squirrel or to cut a hazel wand. The squirrels chattered at him, but he did not heed them; the mother birds fluttered along before him as he came near, to coax him from those shy, sweet nests which contained all their treasures; but Hans brushed by without stopping. He had better sport on hand. Every little while he bent down with hands upon his knees to burst into shouts of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! the crazy old hermit! Won't I lead you a pretty jig, sir?"

The poor hermit was naturally the game of thoughtless,

mischevious Hans. Such youths find their greatest sport in tormenting the odd or unfortunate. Hans had often met the hermit in the forest, and had, ere this, played many idle tricks upon him, such as carrying off his only pig, and turning it loose to make its own way in the wood; or mounting a hideous scarecrow at his gate; or stretching a branch of the wild grape across his path to trip him up. He had been restrained from going into the cottage, only by a wholesome fear of getting within reach of the hermit's sinewy arm. But now he could command a new pastime—a sport which would not only keep him out of the hermit's way, but in its tormenting power was far beyond any clumsy contrivance of his own.

Upon arriving in the glen, he cautiously drew near the cottage, peering through the thicket to see if its inmate was in sight. Yes, there he was, slowly pacing his little garden with his head bent sadly upon his breast. Sometimes, as he paused, he would sigh and shake his head. Hans placed himself snugly amidst the bushes, and putting the horn to his lips, began to blow. The hermit paused a moment, startled and wondering, and looked wildly around.

What magic strain is this? Once before he has heard its alluring notes, when youth was bright, and happiness seemed so near—just waiting to be grasped. How well he recalls that evening! But the charm had already seized him, and slowly, unwillingly, his feet began to move. His joints, to which such joyous exercise had been strangers for years, almost creaked with the lively motion; but as Hans blew louder and faster, away he went, as trippingly as an elf by moonlight. The charm entered his arms, which he flung wildly above him, and his head flew from side to side so that the long beard tossed in the wind; and oh! at last, the magic seized his heart, and he began to laugh—gently at first, then louder, and still louder, as Hans blew fast and furiously, until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and all the sorrow and bitterness seemed to flow out with them and sink in the blessed soil of mother earth.

But when Hans, for lack of breath, changed the strain to a gentler measure, the hermit, dancing more slowly, began to sing to the rollicking music of the wonderful horn; and these were the words, as near as Hans could catch them while he blew:

An old crow sat in an owlet's nest, Oho, oho!

The wind blew east and the wind blew west, Oho!

The owl he said to that very black crow, If you don't get out, I'll make you go,
I own this humble nest.

The owl he took his violin, Alas, alas!

He scraped the bow with rough rosin,
Alas!

He drew the bow, that old black crow
Danced round the owl's nest, high and low,
Till gasping hard, he cried, "I'll go,
Oh, stop and let me pass!"

Up to this time, Hans had restrained his laughter and devoted himself to his part of the sport. But at the last words of the song he forgot all else, and his pent-up merriment burst its bounds.

"He, he he!" he tittered, and stopped blowing. The hermit also stopped, and looking round, spied the boy behind the bushes. Without a word, he turned and walked out into his cottage. There, with his arms resting on the rough table, and his head bowed over them, he sat for hours, while a torrent of healing, blessed tears flowed without check.

Memories of childhood and youth were coming back to him in a flood. He saw the village where he was born, with its bright, flower-dotted meadows. He saw his mother's face, his father's sturdy, upright form. So wonderful was the power of the horn that he heard the shouts of his playmates, joyous, frank and boisterous. But whose face is this, shining, as it seems, through a golden mist? The face of one whom he had loved in those faroff days, the round, rosy, innocent face of a child.

As he seemed to gaze at the face, it grew older, and became the visage of a young girl, saucy and beautiful. He was chasing her through the flower-lit meadows, and her long braids were tossing about her as she flew before him. And then, the face was turned away, and the long braids were coiled about the head, for the girl had grown into a tall maiden, and he was walking by her side through the shady lanes.

Late at night, he sought his hard couch, and falling into quiet slumber, he dreamed again the dreams of youth.

When he woke from this refreshing sleep, he found himself longing for human friends and companions.

"Dear Walden!" he exclaimed, "how could I have been so hard, so mistaken, as to stay all these years away from my own native village? And Elsie and Fritz and the others—I hope they are there still, and I know they would welcome me back again. But Gertrude! Well, I was never tender and thoughtful enough. It was cruel in me to urge her into a marriage which perhaps she shunned; alas! I shall not find her in Walden—she is gone, forever gone!"

For a moment he was sad again, but soon brightening, he continued:

"But yet, the old home is there, and how I long for it!" reaching his arms yearningly into empty air. "I will return this very day. I feel so young and hopeful this morning. I will begin life all over, and be happy again."

He gathered together the few possessions in that humble place which he cared to take with him. It was with a sigh as well as a smile that he closed the door of the cottage that had been his home for nearly ten years, glancing as he did so at the rose vine which was clambering over the roof. As the door swung to, it

struck a long branch, which showered down upon him a wealth of petals. He smiled as he said:

"The climbing rose blooms more richly this year than ever before for ungrateful me, who am leaving it never to return."

And then he sighed, as he whispered:

"If Gertrude's hand could have been here to train the vine, what sweeter spot could have been found for a home?"

He turned away and tramped sturdily toward the highway.

"Home, home!" he said. "The home where my mother's eye smiled upon me, and where my father taught me how to grow up useful and honorable; I am going to my true home now, my dear old village, Walden!"





Sweet Mother Gertrude now draws near,

With hand to soothe, with smile to cheer.

"COME, Mother Gertrude, now at last please tell us about yourself. We want to know the story of your life. You must have had some adventures and one lover, at least, before you came to live with us. Now tell us, won't you, why it is you have never married, like other girls? We see you are still beautiful enough, even now."

The young woman addressed as "Mother Gertrude," sighed instead of blushing, and her nimble fingers paused among

the osiers
she was
weaving into a basket.
"Let me
first see if
there is time
enough be-

fore Miette comes from school. Poor little Mouse, she is not old enough yet to be saddened by all the story of my life. She weeps so bitterly when I speak about her own dear mamma, that I do not talk of these things when she is near."

"There is time enough yet, dear Mother Gertrude. It will be two hours before Little Mouse can get home from school."

"Yes, yes! there'll be time enough; and if not, you can easily finish it to-morrow."

"No, no, to-day, to-day!—we want to hear it all now; you know you promised us six months ago, naughty Mother Gertrude!"

A group of lively and busy girls, all chattering together, surrounded Mother Gertrude. They were sitting on low stools about her feet, among the osiers, each weaving in and out the slender withes. They made a picture pretty enough to adorn even her cheerful cottage.

The time was nearly two months earlier than the exploit of Hans with the hermit, as told in the last chapter. It was even a month before the day when Stella Rosa had taken Miette for a sister and then left her to visit the court of the fairy queen. Mother Gertrude had not yet gone to the village of Stella Rosa with Miette. Her home was at the edge of a large and busy town, big and busy enough to call itself a city. The plain in which it stood was wide enough to hold more than one city without crowding, as well as slow-moving barges along gliding rivers, and brooks pattering through happy villages. Far away, upon the distant edge of the plain began the great forest where Oberon spent his nights, where the hermit sighed his time away, and Hans loitered and found mischief to do. Midway between the city and the forest was a hollow in the plain, scooped out like a great basin, and filled with brooks, trees and singing birds. Here was the village of Stella Rosa.

Mother Gertrude had lived for ten years at the edge of the bustling city in the midst of grateful and loving friends, yet she was a lonely woman except for her little Miette, and all her friends longed to know the reason why. So far she had not told them, although she had made many half promises to the inquiring maids. To-day they united in promising to be very industrious if she would tell her story, and their hands flew in and out among the bending withes.

"See," said one, holding up a half-finished basket, "We are just as busy as even you could wish, Mother Gertrude. Now I

know that at last you will tell us the story."

"Oh, yes, go on, go on, we want the story," they all exclaimed in chorus.

"I don't like to tell all my story, because I am ashamed to confess my girlish follies. Ah!" she sighed again, "I have been well punished for them! but if you really would like to hear——"

"Of course we would," broke in a bright-eyed maid, "and

don't forget the love parts. We are all interested in them."

"I could not tell you much about my life without the story of my lover—it begins so far back," Mother Gertrude said, smiling. "But there is one other strange thing beside, I must relate to you; the very strangest thing that ever happened to me."

"Then go on, Mother Gertrude, we are listening."

"Many years ago, as it seems to me now, I was a gay, light-hearted, light-footed village girl. People told me then that my eyes were sparkling and bright like sunshine on water, but if so, I need not be vain of it now, for tears have washed all the brightness away."

"Oh, no, Mother Gertrude, not all. They are bright now like the first stars before the darkness, and the love is not washed out of them at all."

"Right next to my grandmother's cottage where I had lived since the father and mother died, was the home of my playmate, Christoph. He was three years older, but he never seemed to think himself too old or too manly to be my companion. From the time I was a very little girl, he helped to take care of me, and we used to wander through the meadow and the wood like brother and sister. When we grew to be older, he would sometimes say:

"'Gertrude dear, remember, you are to be my little wife when you grow up—you have promised, you know,'—and I would reply,

"'Of course, Chris, whose wife should I be but yours? I would not think of marrying any one else. I don't know anybody so well as you.'

"'But there mustn't be any one you shall love as well as I, Gertrude.'

"Then I would laugh and toss my braids (I was very vain of them then, because they were long and glossy)——"

"They would be so now, Mother Gertrude, if you didn't keep

them out of sight, under that absurd old cap."

"Never mind the cap. Don't rumple it, please, with your embraces, and let me go on. I would say to Christoph,

"'Oh, I love you well enough, Chris, don't bother me

about it.'

"After a few years, Christoph did not speak to me any more about it, but he would sometimes gaze at me with such a deep look in his eyes, it troubled me a little; and if any of the other lads talked or danced with me, he would look so black! I didn't like worry of any kind, and to trouble my head about the future, or to think of our being any different from what we were, did not suit me at all.

"When I was just seventeen, however, Christoph's uncle sent for him to go and work on his farm, promising if he did well, he should be helped to make a start in life. Then Christoph asked me in earnest to pledge myself to him, and I gave him my

promise.

"Soon after, the people began to talk about a war between our king and the king of the neighboring country. Our village, Walden, was right near the borders, and the other king wanted Walden and other towns and a long strip of country for his own. So our king, who wasn't of a mind to let the other have us and our pastures and woods, sent a big army of soldiers right down into our country. A company of them was quartered at Walden. The soldiers soon became acquainted with our people, and were very pleasant to all the maidens. There was one soldier among them who looked at me a great deal, and would bow very low whenever I met him. He was some kind of an officer, I think, for he had gold lace on his uniform."

"What was the name of the handsome soldier?"

"He told me after awhile that his name was Ordolf. One afternoon, while I was going home from a visit to a friend who lived in the edge of the forest, I met him face to face.

"Beautiful Gertrude!' he said, taking off his tall hat and bowing very low, 'will you allow me to walk with you the rest of

the way?'

"I blushed and smiled and finally said 'yes.' When we

reached grandmother's cottage, he asked if he might go in.

"'You may come in, Sir Soldier,' I replied, 'but I do not know if you may stay, for my grandmother is not fond of soldiers, and she might not make you welcome.'

"'Then, lovely maiden, may I walk with you another day?'

"'Perhaps,' I answered saucily, 'if we should happen to be walking the same way.'

"For many weeks after that, I would meet Ordolf when I walked in the village. It was not long before he told me he loved me, and wished to make me his bride.

"But I cannot, good Ordolf,' I would say, 'I am promised to another.'

"'Is charming Gertrude content to be the wife of a country churl, who knows nothing but to dig in the ground for a living, and can only give her a bare cottage for a home?'

"'You are wronging Christoph,' I would reply, 'to say he doesn't know anything. Before he went away he had learned all that the schoolmaster could teach him, and I have heard that his uncle where he lives trusts him very much.'

"But still, though I spoke out for my betrothed, I did not refuse to listen to Ordolf. So finally, it was commonly reported in the village that I had forsaken my old friend for the handsome soldier. "It was about this time that the enemy's king made up his mind to send an army to the border. We were all very much frightened, and every one who knew where to go hurried away from the village. My grandmother was at her wits' end. We could not stay there, she said, and she was old and had no friends far away whom we could seek in our trouble.

"'If it were not for the grandchild, the old woman might stay and die, if need be, but what would become of my pretty

Gertrude?'

"In the midst of our distress, Ordolf, the soldier, came to see

my grandmother.

"'If you will give me this pretty girl for my wife,' he said, 'you shall be taken care of. To-morrow the ladies of the castle go with an escort to the walled town of Bergen. I am to command the squad, and in the company I can find a place for you and Gertrude. Let your granddaughter go with me early in the morning to be married, and all will be well. You shall live safely in Bergen until the enemy is well out of the way and the war is over. Then I will take care of you both.'

"'What say you, my child, will you marry him?"

"'I cannot, Granny, I am pledged to Christoph,' I said in distress.

"'But after all, a soldier is a better man in time of war than a farmer,' muttered my grandmother. 'Child, there is no other way, we must accept his offer. Christoph is far from here and cannot help us. And if he were here, what could he do?

"I shed a few tears while my grandmother and the soldier were pleading with me, but at last I said 'yes.' It was very weak and wrong in me, I know. Ordolf went away to make everything

ready for the marriage and our departure.

"But that night, I sat in my little room, weeping bitterly and thinking of Christoph, good, kind Christoph, to whom I had been so false. Suddenly, I said to myself through my tears:

"'I cannot forsake him, my old friend, whom I love best after

all. I will not marry Ordolf. I will go and find Christoph.'

"I roused my grandmother in the darkness and begged her to go with me to the place where Christoph was living. We had neither of us been more than a few miles from the village in our lives, and did not know anything about the way, except that it lay through the forest. Dear granny yielded to my pleadings and hastily gathered together a few clothes, some food, and the money she had been saving for me. I left a letter for Ordolf, telling him of my resolution, and we set out toward the forest.

"Granny was strong for her age and vigorous, so we walked at a good pace, carrying our bundles. Just as we reached the wood the moon rose, so that it was not very dark. We found a smooth road, and I felt that every step was taking us nearer to Christoph. Suddenly, after we had been walking a long while, and were in the depths of the forest, I saw a curious light flickering before us. As I watched it, it would grow bright, then seem to go out altogether, and again, after a moment, flash up nearer and brighter than before.

"'Look, Granny, do you see that strange light? What can it mean?'

"'Mean, child? It means elves or wicked fairies, and danger of some kind, I don't know what. Oh, I wish I were safe back in my bed! I'd rather die there, if die I must, than in this strange place, with all kinds of dreadful things around in the shadows!' and my grandmother turned as if to go back.

"'Oh, Granny,' I said, bursting into tears, 'let us not go back! Surely the way before us is no worse than that which we

have passed!'

"While we stood trembling and in doubt a sudden strain of tiny music started up, so near us it seemed right at my elbow. It was so bright, so merry and rollicking, that before we knew it, we began to dance like children. Then the light and the music started on together before us, and we followed in spite of ourselves, holding tight to our bundles, and dancing away around and around in a maze of curious figures. The light and the music kept leading us farther from the path into the forest, but we could not stop. My grandmother, who a little while before had been so sad and fearful, laughed like a girl, swinging her bundle around her head and tossing it about her. How long we went on I cannot tell, for we had forgotten everything but the fun of the moment.

"But everything must come to an end, and so did our mad race. We had reached an open space in the forest, when suddenly the music drew off into the distance and ceased. When we stopped and looked about us, dawn was reddening the lowest sky, giving us light enough to see before us a low cottage, with its door standing wide open. We went to it, and looking in, saw a bed of straw in the corner. My grandmother, tired out, sank upon it, and I soon laid myself beside her and fell asleep.

"When I woke, much refreshed, the sun was high. I found a spring near by, from which I brought water for our breakfast. Some berries I found on bushes outside the door, with barley bread, made us a good meal. Then I called my grandmother, and we ate at the rough table in the corner. After we had rested awhile longer, we made up our bundles again, and started on our journey. We walked a long while through the forest that day before we came to a road. Soon after we found the wood getting thinner and the trees farther apart, with frequent open spaces. Then in the distance we caught sight of fields.

"'See, Granny,' I exclaimed, very glad but weary, 'we shall get somewhere before long! I shouldn't wonder if those fields were sown by Christoph's own hand. How bright they look in the setting sun!'

"Soon after we came to the edge of the forest and by that time the sun was down. A hut stood near the wood a little way from us. We went to it, and found there an old woman, a fagot gatherer, who made us welcome, but did not know anything about Christoph. The next morning we started across the plain, traveling slowly along, and inquiring at every hamlet and farmhouse for my betrothed. It seemed as if I could not rest until I found him, but we never heard the least word about him. The people were kind to us, and took us in at night, not often asking anything in return for food and shelter. Then one day my grandmother began to be ill. I was frightened, thinking she might not be able to get to a place of shelter, but she kept up until we reached this town, and I found a cottage empty, as if waiting for us. What happened then you know."

"Poor Mother Gertrude! and did you never hear from

Christoph?"

"Never a word. My grandmother was so ill, I could not leave her until her death. Then, when I thought again of starting to seek for Christoph, my loneliness frightened me, and I said to myself,

"'I could not find him when I tried so hard, but sometime he will find me, I know, for Christoph will never forget me. I will stay right here and wait for him, and when he comes, he

shall find me expecting him.'

"So here I have waited ever since, but still he does not come. I have grown sad, I think, and weary, and sometimes imagine that he has forgotten me after all. But I am not so unhappy as I might be, if you were not all so very, very kind."

"Kind, dear Mother Gertrude? It is you who are kind to us. How could we help loving you when we know you are such an angel of goodness to all the poor and the sick, that the whole

neighborhood calls you 'mother'?

"And now you are teaching us to weave these pretty baskets so that we may lay aside money for our dowries."

"But you haven't told us how you came by little Miette."

"Yes, I must tell you that, for it finishes my story.—I was so lonely after Grandmother died, that when my day's work was done, I used to visit the sick who were poor, or had few friends to care for them. One day I heard of a sick woman with a child, lying neglected in a miserable house not far from my home. In the evening I visited her and took with me some nourishing soup. By the dim light I saw a wasted form upon the couch, but what was my amazement when I heard her whisper, 'Gertrude, don't

you know me? Looking closer, my heart almost stood still when I saw that she was Christoph's sister! Christoph's sister, Elsie, who was married a few months before we were driven out of Walden! She shed tears of joy at seeing me, and then told me her sad tale. How her husband had become separated from her, in the desertion of the village, and she had wandered, seeking him, as I had sought Christoph, all in vain. How after these long months, she had come with her baby, little Miette, still searching for him, to this place, and had been taken down with the fever and lay helpless and dying. Oh, how I worked to bring her back to life! But after a few days, she passed away, leaving the baby, our little Miette, to my care until her father should be found. Now you know all my story and Miette's, and how I have come to be, what your love has named me, 'Mother Gertrude.'"

"Just look!" suddenly exclaimed one of the girls who sat near the window. "A man with a pack upon his back is knock-

ing at the door. He must be a peddler."

"A peddler!" exclaimed the girls, dropping their baskets in excitement. "Oh, please, Mother Gertrude, do invite him in! We want to buy some ribbons and bodice lacings and——"

But by this time Mother Gertrude was opening the door with

an indulgent smile upon her face.

The girls saw her smile change to a look of uncertainty—then of recognition.

"It must be—it surely is—Giebel!" she exclaimed.

"Gertrude! can that be little Gertrude?" said the peddler.

"Oh, Giebel, how glad I am to see you! now I shall hear from home."

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The voice of Mikterenos had gradually been growing fainter and farther away until it ceased altogether. At that point she twitched her head around toward me so suddenly that my eyes, which had somehow got themselves shut, flew open.

"Asleep, were you? and actually snoring!" she exclaimed, rising from the floor in high dudgeon. "Well, if you don't care

to hear my story, I'll tell some one else, but you'll be sorry, you'll

be sorry!"

She lifted her staff, shook it at me, and flitted in an offended way toward the door, at each step setting her sharp heels against the floor with a click. Her anger alarmed me so much, that I roused myself to make my peace with her.

"I sincerely beg your pardon, your Serenity," I hastened to say. "I did not mean it, indeed. The heat of the room, I think,

made me drowsy."

"The heat of the room!" she snapped, "Why, the room has been chilly and cold for the last half hour, and I have been shivering awfully and growing dull, in consequence. That fire has been getting very low."

"Oh, yes, certainly! That is what I meant, Madam Mikterenos—the cold it was which made me fall asleep. I was really

deeply interested. Pray go on with your story."

"Well," said Mikterenos more mildly, "If the cold has put you

to sleep, we can soon mend that."

"She again approached the fire, and again plunged her staff into the coals. Up shot the ambient, iridescent light, and again my brain whirled with the whirling figures.

She stretched her hands toward the blaze as if to warm them, and then thrust in the magic staff a second time, muttering to herself as she stirred the coals.

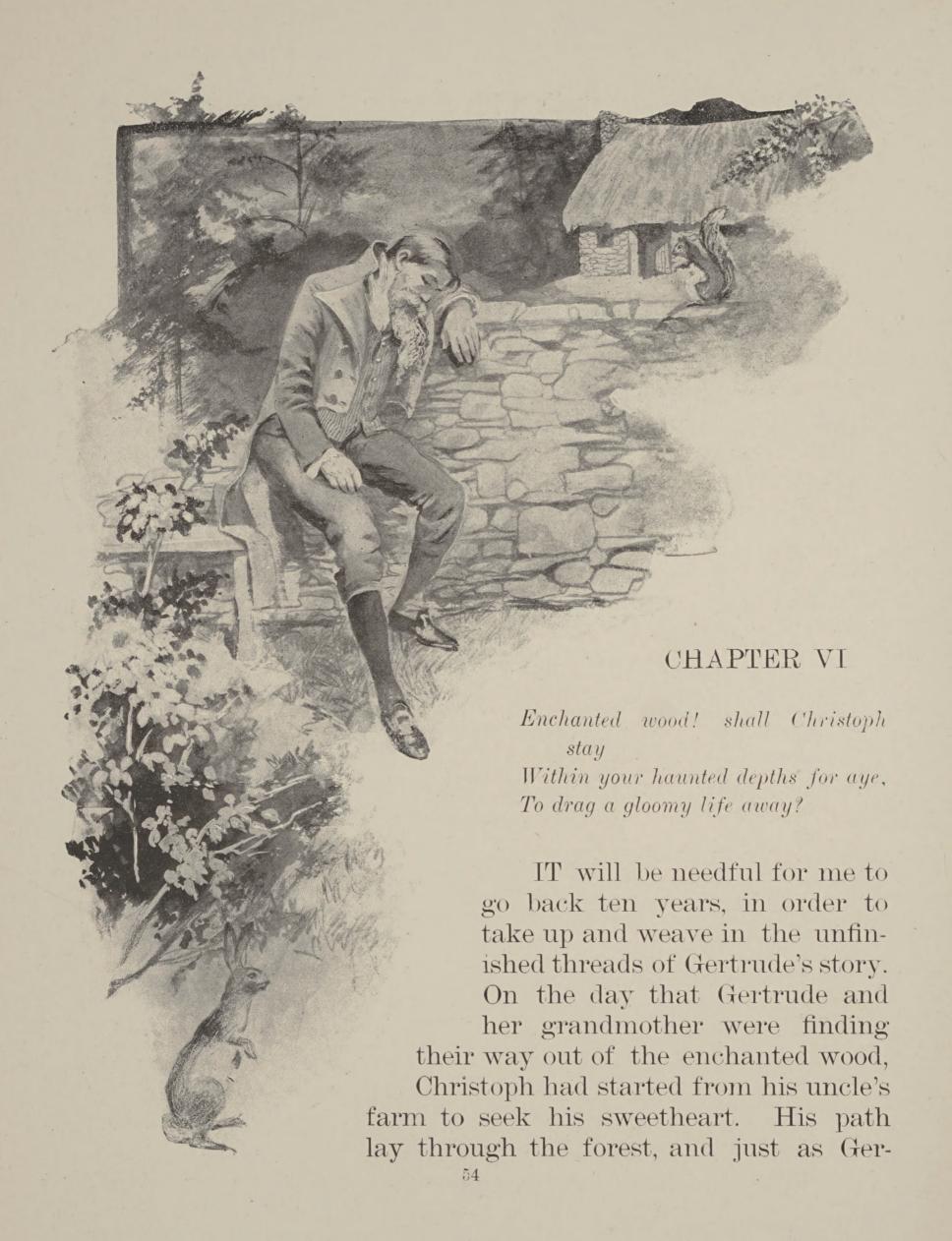
"Yes, yes! so much heat as it takes to keep the fancy burning! so much heat to warm again the memory of the times which have passed away! the old world has grown cold—so cold!"

The flames as they roared up the chimney changed from deep red to glowing pink, and the glow, expanding until it filled the room, wrapped the old fairy as if in a shimmering mantle of rose.

"Ha, ha! cold, did I say? it has turned cold to the fairy race, all except Titania; and she, poor queen, learned so much love from the mortals whom she kept with her, that she is always longing to come back and share it with them. Cold? not while

brothers and sisters walk with arms twined about each other's necks; and mothers kiss their sleeping babies; and old friends like Christoph and Gertrude are still true;—oh, how this lovely heat-cloak warms me through and through! now I can go on and tell the story of Christoph and Gertrude."





trude, utterly misled by the fairy horn, was leaving it in one direction, he was entering it from the other. It is certain that if Oberon had not waylaid the luckless girl, she would have met the lover whom she was seeking.

Nightfall came, but too much in haste to wait for dawn, Christoph pressed on. Near midnight, he came within the magic circle which had wrought such distress to Gertrude and her grandmother. Oberon was, there, and Puck had already brought the news of Christoph's approach to his master.

"This is the lover of the slender lass who tripped to such a merry measure over these paths last night. What is your will, good master? Shall I lead him astray from his maiden, and bewilder him in the forest?"

"Oh, keep him out of the lass's way, by all means. It's no pastime for me to unite wandering lovers. Leave that to Titania. It would please her better than I wish, to bring them together. Is the girl well out of the forest?"

"Yes, your Majesty. No trace of her has been seen since fairies were abroad to-night."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Oberon, "a sprightlier dancer I never saw, strong and limber and lithe! and that old crone! My pretty bugle put life into her stiff limbs. Come, my precious," he continued, lifting the horn and patting it with immense satisfaction, "we'll give the lover a taste of the same hearty exercise! Do you, good Puck, summon all my attendants. Will-o-the-wisp, light your lantern; here he comes—now ready—away!"

"Whither, your Majesty?"

"Lead him over the same path his lass's feet pattered so lightly last night. Leave him at the cottage at dawn, but mind you, don't set him on her traces. Now pipe up, merry horn!"

Up piped the merry horn, and up jumped Will-o-the-wisp, swinging his lantern hither and yon; and Oberon blew with might and main, and Puck with wings outspread, perched with one foot on Christoph's shoulder, and sang saucy rhymes in his ear. If the good armorer who gave the horn to the world could

have known how careless Oberon was with it bringing only pain and grief to Christoph, he would have left out of its composition the sharp, glistening filings which made mischief, and left only the silver and gold.

But then it would have been of much less use to His Royal Mischievousness, King Oberon.

When the first faint light of dawn appeared, Christoph, whom the notes of the horn had led astray all night, found himself, as Gertrude had done the night before, near the cottage with its open door. Away went Oberon to seek shelter from the heat of the day, and away went the horn. Christoph entered the cottage, little supposing that it had the night before given shelter to his sweetheart. Lying upon the pile of straw, he, too, slept until the sun was high in the heavens.

After a breakfast from the lunch stored in his wallet, he again started on his way, and before night, was on the highroad to Walden.

When Christoph, the next day, drew near the village, he found it almost deserted. The troops had marched against the enemy, and the frightened people, feeling that their last stay was gone, had fled to places which were supposed to be safer. He went at once to Gertrude's cottage, but looked in vain for his love. As he was leaving, overcome with doubt and fear at not finding her, he met a decrepit and deserted old woman, too infirm to travel, who was hobbling along on her cane.

"So, so! he's found the cage, but the pretty bird has flown. She liked the gay plumage of the handsome soldier better than his sober coat."

"What do you mean, dame? My Gertrude knew no soldier; oh, speak and tell me where she is, if you know, or I shall go mad!"

"Not so fast, good Christoph! How should the lame old raven know where the young bird with strong limbs has flown? But every one knew she was to marry the handsome soldier, and when they both went on the same day, how could any one think but that they went together?" "I do not believe it! How dare you say my Gertrude, my little girl, has forsaken me for a soldier? I do not believe it, I tell you!" he almost shrieked. "You are taunting me because she is lost—gone, perhaps, to find me!"

He strode past her, and raced up and down the street like mad. He ran in and out among the empty houses, calling "Gertrude, Gertrude!" in a frenzy of despair, but he was answered only by the echoing walls. He entered Gertrude's cottage. It was empty except for the confusion left by a raid of lawless soldiery. He looked out of the window, where she so often sat with him, into the little garden, but could see nothing, outside or in, but hideous disorder. After a time, when he became calmer, he met Fritz, his dearest friend, who had returned for some household goods. Without greeting him, Christoph began:

"What has become of my Gertrude? I went to her home to find her, but she is gone, and that lying beldame says she has left me for a soldier!"

"Christoph, dear Christoph, old friend! what can I say? I'm sorry to give you pain, but I'm afraid it is true. Ordolf, the corporal, has been seen very often with her of late, and two nights ago her grandmother called to me to say good-bye, and told me Gertrude was going to marry the soldier in the morning, and then they were to leave under his protection to stay until the war was over."

"Fritz, if this is true, and true it must be because you say so, oh, my pretty, precious girl! Why, we grew up together, and I loved her better than any one else, all my life long. If I could only find that soldier! Oh, Fritz! I am but a farmer, but I can shoot straight enough——"

"Christoph, would you harm Gertrude's husband?"

"Ah, I forgot! true, he is her husband, and more, a defender of our country. No, I can do nothing—nothing. I would not injure a hair of her head, and I would not injure him for her sake. Oh, Fritz, old friend, I have lost my faith in mankind! from this time on, I will never love nor believe in anything again. Gertrude false! why doesn't the sun turn black?"

"Christoph, dear fellow, don't talk so wildly. There are many true hearts in the world yet. I would do all I could to comfort

you, and so would your other friends."

Christoph shook his head sadly. "But oh, this pain at my heart! you cannot heal that;" and he turned wearily away. Fritz followed him and tried to draw the despairing youth along with him.

"Come, friend Christoph, come with me."

Christoph drew away.

"I say, come, Christoph."

Christoph gently pushed aside the hand laid upon his shoulder. After many entreaties, Fritz was obliged to leave him, to return to

his own people.

Through these bitter hours, Christoph had forgotten the sister who had been, next to Gertrude, the one nearest his heart. But now, as he turned away from Fritz, he thought of her. Where was Elsie? Her home was deserted—she, too, doubtless was gone with her husband to seek safety.

Gone, all gone! sweetheart, sister, home! he alone left, except for a malicious old woman, amid the wreck of the once happy village. He met the old dame again, and shared with her the food in his wallet, and gave her a few coins from his small store; and then left her weeping. He walked aimlessly through the meadows and fields, repeating over and over her name—Gertrude, Gertrude, Gertrude!

He never knew how he passed the next few days. But at last, in his wanderings, he fell in with a troop of the enemy, who pressed him into the service of their king.

He was now in a sad plight. Deserted, as he supposed, by Gertrude, and obliged to fight against the country which he loved, death would have been welcome to him. But it did not come to still his troubled heart. When peace was declared, he was released, but his freedom brought him no joy. On his way to his

uncle's farm, to which he went because he knew of no other place, he thought of the lonely hut where he had rested from the adventures of that strange night. He found it again, after a long search, deeply hidden in the secluded glade. He made the forlorn cottage his home, and became the Hermit of the Lonely Glen. His Royal and Mischievous Highness, King Oberon, having separated the lovers, was at last content to leave him in peace, until the magic horn in the hands of our doughty Hans, roused him again to life and hope.





given Gertrude many new thoughts to

carry around with her The old peddler

had known her from a baby, and had

sold her grandmother Gertrude's first pair of shoes. He talked to her with all the freedom of an old friend. He had been in Walden a few months before, had seen Fritz and Louise—Gertrude's dearest schoolmate, now married to Fritz—and many other of Gertrude's early friends. The wonder was still great among them that they had never heard from her. They all believed that she had married Ordolf, the corporal, but why had she never come to see them? Why had she sent them no word? Another mystery of which the good people talked was Christoph's disappearance. No one had seen him since the day, ten years before, when Fritz had met him at Walden, and told him the painful news of Gertrude's marriage. Giebel repeated all of Fritz's story to Gertrude, and told how wildly Christoph had sorrowed.

"We believe old Chris enlisted and was killed in the war, as he might well do after such news as that," said Fritz; "but what has become of Gertrude? Well might she be ashamed to come back to her old home after forsaking good Christoph and marrying her soldier, and that may be why we have never heard from her."

"But perhaps," said Louise, "she is living and in trouble. Sorrow comes to those who do wrong."

These words, repeated by the peddler to Gertrude, made her shed many tears.

"I did do wrong, Giebel, but I have deeply repented. To think that my old friends should believe such things of me! Alas! how could they help it when they saw the soldier with me every day? Still, sorrow also comes to those who have not done wrong, or why should Christoph have been made so unhappy? Oh, if I only knew where he is."

"He may be dead, Gertrude," said the peddler.

"No, Giebel, he is not dead. Something in my heart tells me that he lives, and that I shall see him again. Dear Giebel, search for him, search for him wherever you go with your pack, and let me know the news whatever it is." "Indeed I will, Gertrude. I will send him to you when I find him, and I know he will come across the world, if you want it."

After Giebel's departure, Gertrude was more restless and unhappy than she had been since her grandmother's death. It grieved her to the heart to know that her childhood friends were

believing such things of her.

"I must go back to Walden," she said to herself, "in spite of the dangers of that terrible forest. I must tell them I am waiting still for Christoph. But how can I take little Miette, dear, timid child, through the enchanted wood! I cannot venture into it with her. No, I must leave her with friends until I return."

But when Gertrude told the Little Mouse that she expected to leave her for awhile, Miette cried herself into a fever. Then Mother Gertrude cured the fever by promising that Miette should go with her—that she should not be left behind.

"And I will carry a big, big bundle, oh, ever so big, dear

Mother Gertrude, if I may really go along with you."

And that was why they left the great bustling town and journeyed on through meadows and groves, in the late May weather, and stopped in the villages and at the farmsteads, until Miette grew very weary.

One day they reached the valley where Stella Rosa lived.

Miette was enchanted.

"Oh, Mother Gertrude, what a place to live in, what a place to rest in! please, please, dear Mother Gertrude, may we stay here awhile until our feet get well?"

"Yes, here we will rest awhile, Miette, for I see your little feet

are sore with tramping."

The cottage which she found for her home was humble, but it was cheerful and tidy. She still had the portion of money left her by her grandmother, to which she had added by years of industry. While Miette's shoes were not fine and her gown was of simple stuff, she and Mother Gertrude were far from being the "beggars" which vain Adrietta had rudely called them.

They were still lingering in the happy village on the day

when Christoph, after his years of exile, was hastening back to Walden.

It did not take Christoph long to clear the forest, for his footsteps were as light as, when a youth, he first passed that way. His heart bounded with joy when, across the wide meadows, he saw the little hamlet lying, with the smoke rising peacefully from its cottage roofs.

The first person he met as he reached the village, had a familiar look. He drew near—paused a moment—called out:

"Fritz!"

"Eh, who's this? Christoph, as I live! and with such a beard! Why, man, where have you been all these years, and why have we never heard of you?"

"Not so very far in distance, old friend. Do you remember when I saw you last, and—and the grief which came to me that dreadful day?"

"Ah, yes, old Chris, I remember it well. Come to our home, and see my wife, and tell me all about your adventures, and then in my turn, I may have something to tell you."

"Have you ever heard any thing of—Gertrude?" inquired

Christoph, as they walked along.

"It is about her I wanted to talk to you. You remember old Giebel, the peddler?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, one day, a matter of two months ago or less, he was walking with his pack through a city the other side of the forest, and after knocking at a cottage door, whom should he meet face to face, but Gertrude? She was overjoyed to see him, and made him go home with her and tell all about her old friends; but more than all, of you."

"But her husband!"

"I am coming to that; Christoph, it was all a mistake. She went off in the night with her grandmother to find you, but lost her way in the forest, and wandered about until they reached the city. Then her grandmother became ill, and finally died, and

Gertrude could not leave her while she lived. She said to Giebel:

"'Tell Christoph, if you ever meet him, that I was true to him at the last. I am waiting for him now, if he cares to seek me here.'

"Oh, Fritz! my poor girl, how she must have suffered all these years! Tell me, where is the village, so that I may go to her at once?"

"Oh! that is not all, Christoph. But see, here is Louise, and and these are my children. Come here, rogues, if your faces are clean. And now, sit down awhile, and rest while I finish Gertrude's story."

Then he gently told him of Elsie's death, and of little Miette, whom Gertrude was bringing up as her own child.

Again the tears rolled between Christoph's fingers, sorrowful tears, this time.

"Fritz, old friend—and I have buried myself away from my people all these years. But tell me, quick, where is the city—I must find them!"

"Alas, that I cannot tell you. Louise, why were we so stupid as not to ask Giebel the name of the town?" and Fritz struck his forehead with his fist. "I did not ask Giebel, never thinking I should meet you; but he would surely know. You must find him and he will direct you."

"Pray, where can I find Giebel?"

"He was here, perhaps a fortnight, or it may be three weeks ago. He said he was going to Dort, at the edge of the forest. You might hear of him there."

After a refreshing rest, Christoph set off to Dort. As he entered, he met a villager.

"Can you tell me where Giebel, the peddler, is?"

"Giebel? I saw him pass by here with his pack over a fortnight ago. He was walking toward the forest, and although he said 'Good day' and 'God keep you,' he did not tell me where he was going. If you want to find him, old Stiefel, the cobbler, who is a crony of his, will tell you about him." Christoph went to Stiefel, who was sitting in his shop with his leathern apron on, and in his lap a shoe, into which he had just fitted a peg. Now Stiefel was something of a wag, and was supposed by the villagers to have more than ordinary wisdom. When Christoph drew near, he nodded with a quizzical look, and began to sing as he plied his mallet—

"I and the doctor are men of renown,
The wisest of mortals are we!
He doses the people, each head for a crown,
That the grave-digger idle may be.
He cobbles their bodies while I mend their soles,
He fills up his pockets, while I fill the holes,
And merry as crickets are we!
Rap, rap, rap! each peg with a tap
Goes into the sole of the shoe;
Tap, tap, tap! a farthing a rap—
Who needs mending?—Stranger, do you?"

"It's neither body nor shoe which needs mending with me," said Christoph, "my mind is troubled, and I want relief from that."

"Hm-m!" muttered the shoemaker, looking him over from head to foot, "they all seem a little the worse for wear. But if it's either mind or soul, you should go to the pastor, who is a greater man even than I. I can't help you."

"You can help me, if you will tell me where Giebel, the ped-

dler, may be found at once."

"Then you'll have to go to the pastor after all, for it would take a wiser man than I to tell you. I knew where he was a fortnight ago, but Giebel is like the wind, never long in the same place."

"Oh, tell me where he was going—I must see him right

away."

"If you are wanting a new pair of shoes, I'll make one for you, and save you a chase around the country after the peddler."

"No, no! it is not that! Giebel knows where my true-love is, whom I have lost, and have not seen for years. If you could only tell me where to find him——"

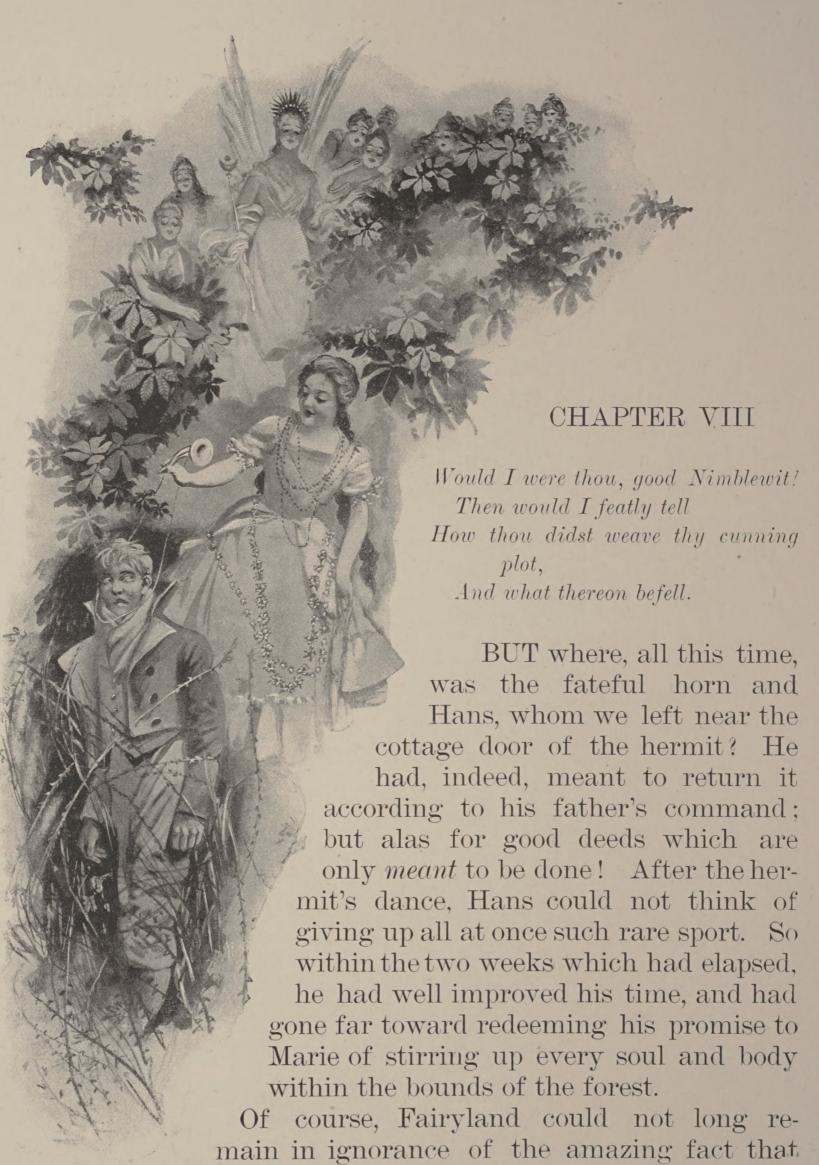
"So that he might send you after her? A regular merry-goround! I've a mind to join in the chase myself and follow in *your* track. Perhaps if I went on long enough I might find the wise man who could show me the end of the rainbow. I do hope you may find the maiden, and I'd help you if I could. Well, if you'll keep along the edge of the wood until you get to the highway, then follow that to the first village on the other side, you'll go over the same track he traveled two weeks ago, and that is all I can tell you."

Christoph was becoming discouraged, but he still trudged on, in the trail of the ever-vanishing peddler. From one village to another, then among the country folk and farmhouses he searched, only to find that Giebel was always a fortnight ahead. No one ever knew more than the peddler's last stopping place. At last he lost the clue altogether. Then a friendly farmer said to him:

"Giebel always stops at the inn near the west gate in Bergen. Go there and they will be sure to know something about him. Take the nearest road straight through the forest."

"That forest!" sighed Christoph. "It must be my doom. Shall I end my life in its gloomy shade?"

Thanking the farmer for his kindness, he turned again to the forest. But oh, that horn of Oberon! Take care, Christoph, you are throwing yourself anew in the way of fate!



the prize was in the hands of a mortal. Such excitement reigned in the kingdom from that time on as was never known before, as I can testify, for I was there to see. Titania was at first overjoyed, and declared that since the horn was now out of the grasp of her cruel lord, it would soon be in hers.

When Oberon finally woke from that long sleep which had lasted until twilight, he found the horn missing. Puck, who since his return had been covering his master with gossamers to shelter him from the heat, was sitting near him with drooping head.

Oberon fairly quivered with rage, and threw the whole blame

of the loss upon his unlucky Puck.

"Bat! Mole! Stupid!" he sputtered, "You know the heat of my enemy, the sun, overpowers me, and your duty should have led you to return ere I went to sleep. No doubt you were chasing your own pleasure among your grinning cronies, the Laughing Goblins! Away! Out of my sight! I want no more such service! now I know that you are the dull dolt I have always thought you."

Now when we consider that Oberon had always declared Puck to be his swiftest and cleverest attendant, this was rather hard on the tricksy fairy. Who so inseparable as Oberon and Puck? Who so light and quick to fetch and carry, so apt in teasing and bewildering, as the jovial, slight page? Puck could not deny, however, that he had lingered for the space of fully three minutes and three quarters with the Laughing Goblins. They had been teaching him to play football with his own head, while he sat by on one of the peaks of the Moon Mountains and watched the sport—a feat never before attempted in magic. Trembling under Oberon's rage, he left the presence of his angry king, and hid himself in the hollow trunk of a distant tree, to grieve over the loss of his power and importance.

Meanwhile, the two opposing heads of Fairyland were watching each other's movements with jealous eyes. If they had been agreed, Hans could not have kept the horn as long as it takes me to say it. But Titania had made up her willful mind that it

should not fall into Oberon's mischievous hands again, and Oberon was equally determined that his ambitious spouse should not secure it. Titania had gained one immense advantage in having won to her cause Nimblewit, by many believed to be the cleverest fairy in the kingdom, while Oberon had lost his agile Puck. The king and the queen were fully occupied in defeating each other's well-laid plans. No sooner had Titania woven a spell which should put Hans to sleep until one of her followers could snatch the prize, than Oberon's men would throw pepper dust into his face, and a fine fit of sneezing would wake him thoroughly. If Will-o-the-wisp was leading him into a bog where, helpless and floundering, he should be surrounded by eager fairies, Nimblewit would scatter the fairy mist and show him his danger. In spite of plot and counterplot by the shrewd and sprightly people, Hans still wore the horn, fastened by its tiny chain to a strong guard about his neck.

During the day when Christoph was again approaching the forest on his way to Bergen, the excitement in the fairy kingdom had reached its height. Queen Titania's law required that the night fairies should sleep while the sun was hottest, so that all might be fresh as evening dew for their night revels. Yet Titania herself, unlike Oberon, was not wilted by the sun's heat.

It is time now to tell you the secret of Titania's being. She was a creature of the dew, the perfume of flowers, and the rich juices of forest trees which give the leaves their color and substance; she was all these and more; for at her heart was a fine core of fire. Most fairies are of only two elements. Oberon was of four, and that is why he became king. But Titania, the queen, was a higher-born creature than even Oberon himself, because her heart was born of the sun. The fire kept her awake while other fairies longed to sleep, and at this time turned day into night in Fairyland. When her heart was full of anger, its ruddy glow suffused her whole being and the air about her, so that the mist and dew fairies fled to the brooks. But Oberon, having no

fire, could not glow; he could only fume like a tiny cataract, when

he was angry, or gurgle like a bubbling spring.

All that livelong day, then, Titania waked, and kept her fairies roused and alert. There was hurry and bustle, there was rushing hither and yon, on wings, on feet, on the back of the south wind, all around the forest. As soon as Christoph stepped into its shade again, he heard the rustle, and felt the whirring of unseen wings, and knew that something strange was in the air. Sometimes a flying troop of Oberon's men would rush into the ranks of the enemy, but no great harm was done, except for a few jeers which did not sting, some twisted mouths which did not bite, and twiddling fingers which did not pinch.

Every hour Titania would call Nimblewit into her presence. "Come, Nimblewit, my trusted friend, ruffle your airy thought into a whirlwind of scheming, if need be, until we can devise a plan to secure the prize. I have sworn to humble my mocking and heartless lord."

"My queen, fain would I win it, not only for your sake, but for my own. Oberon has often scorned me, and preferred to me the agile Puck, who with all his swiftness and lightness, has not half my wit. But well I know that in our plans we need the aid of a mortal friendly to us. Oberon himself could not keep Hans from giving it to such a one, and then from his hands we might receive it."

"Well go now, Nimblewit, and speed your thinking. In the meantime, I will double the guard who watch the quick spies of Oberon."

The third hour after midday Titania sent for him again.

"Nimblewit, to-night will be a night of fate. It shall long be remembered in fairy annals, if we act well our part, and achieve this glorious victory. Do you know who has entered again the bounds of the magic forest? It is Christoph, good Christoph, whom Oberon separated from his fair Gertrude. Let it be our part to bring them together. That we may do, if we capture Oberon's horn before the shadows have all entered the forest."

"My queen, the horn shall be in your hand by the time the shadows thicken. Nimblewit will find a way."

The fairy passed from the queen's presence into the Garden of Fountains. There he spied Stella Rosa, who still lingered in the queen's bower. She was reclining in a listening attitude, with sweet thoughts written upon her face, while a fountain was laughing and singing to her with tinkling voice, and bursting into water violets.

Nimblewit sprang from the ground with delight.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Stella Rosa, the beautiful, shall win the horn from Hans."

Flying back on feet that did not feel the ground, he sought admission to the queen.

"Your Majesty," he cried, "the horn shall be ours! I have thought of a way to defeat the wiles of Oberon."

"Speak!" said the Queen, the glow of excitement dyeing her face and neck like the heart of a hermosa; "speak quickly, and reveal your thought. Oh, if I win this prize, I will never again seek to oppose my lord. I will be in all things a dutiful wife."

Then Nimblewit unfolded the plan which had come into his mind when he saw Stella Rosa in the Garden of Fountains. The queen listened, sometimes adding a word or making an inquiry.

"She shall win the horn, you will have your revenge, I shall have mine—and then let proud Oberon rage!"

"Nimblewit, the scheme shall be carried out. But before we perfect our plans I must tell my goddaughter, and assign to her her part. Go, Lightwing," she said to a fairy near her, "call Stella Rosa to me."

Stella Rosa soon appeared, moving up the hall to the raised dais of the queen at the other end. The light, falling from the crystal roof in interwoven bars of all the hues of fancy, shifted across and around her gently swaying form. It seemed as if grace had found not only a form, but coloring all its own.

"You know, Stella Rosa," said the queen, "how longingly I

covet the horn of my lord Oberon, now in the hands of the forester's son. I am determined to obtain it at any cost."

"Dear godmother, if it is Oberon's, why should you long for it so much?"

"Dear goddaughter, because it is Oberon's. Why should I not have Oberon's horn for awhile? Did he not beguile from me what I held most dear? Has he not mocked and insulted me—me, his wife, and the queen of this dominion?"

"But among mortals it is base to seek revenge, dear Fairy Queen."

"Base!" exclaimed the queen. "I have heard whispers of such a thing, but I do not understand. What can we do when we are injured except to get revenge, if we are shrewd enough? Why, goddaughter, my heart would burn until it had dried up all the dew in Fairyland if I could not show Oberon that I was his match in wit and cunning."

"My mamma has taught me another way, dear godmother," said Stella Rosa, while the timid rose color dyed her face. "She has said that I must forgive those who have injured me, and do good to them instead of evil. Then the heart does not burn, but glow; and the dew sparkles in the glow, and never passes away."

A silence settled over the room. The fairies looked at each other in wonder, for such teachings they had never heard in Fairyland. After a while the queen sighed as if she were giving up something precious to her.

"But, goddaughter, if we take the horn and keep it only for a night's pastime, and restore it in the morning, will you help us to get it?"

"Dear godmother, not if it helps you to have your revenge," said Stella Rosa, hanging her head and bursting into tears.

Then the queen, after a moment's silence, spoke in her gentlest tones:

"Listen, my Stella Rosa. For your sake I will give up my revenge. But it was not all revenge which made me long to capture the horn. Oberon cares not for your mortal race except to make them the sport of his pleasures. His resistless horn misled and troubled them without ceasing. Two lovers were long ago separated by his arts and this too playful bugle. To-day each wanders alone, seeking the other. Help me to get the horn, and it shall be my first duty to bring these wanderers together."

"Oh, you lovely, lovely Fairy Queen! oh, you beautiful god-mother!" cried Stella Rosa, "how sweet in you to think of it!" and she threw herself at the feet of Titania, and kissed the fairy's

hands again and again.

Eglantine, who until this time had stood silent behind the queen, with head hanging, as if in grief, looked up with a smile of delight as well as a dewy tear, and also fell at the feet of the queen.

"Help me, Goddaughter," continued the queen, "and you yourself shall witness the happy ending of these sorrows. At dawn I will restore the horn to my consort, Oberon, and so appease his anger."

"Dear Godmother, I would help you gladly in all that is

right, but what can I do?"

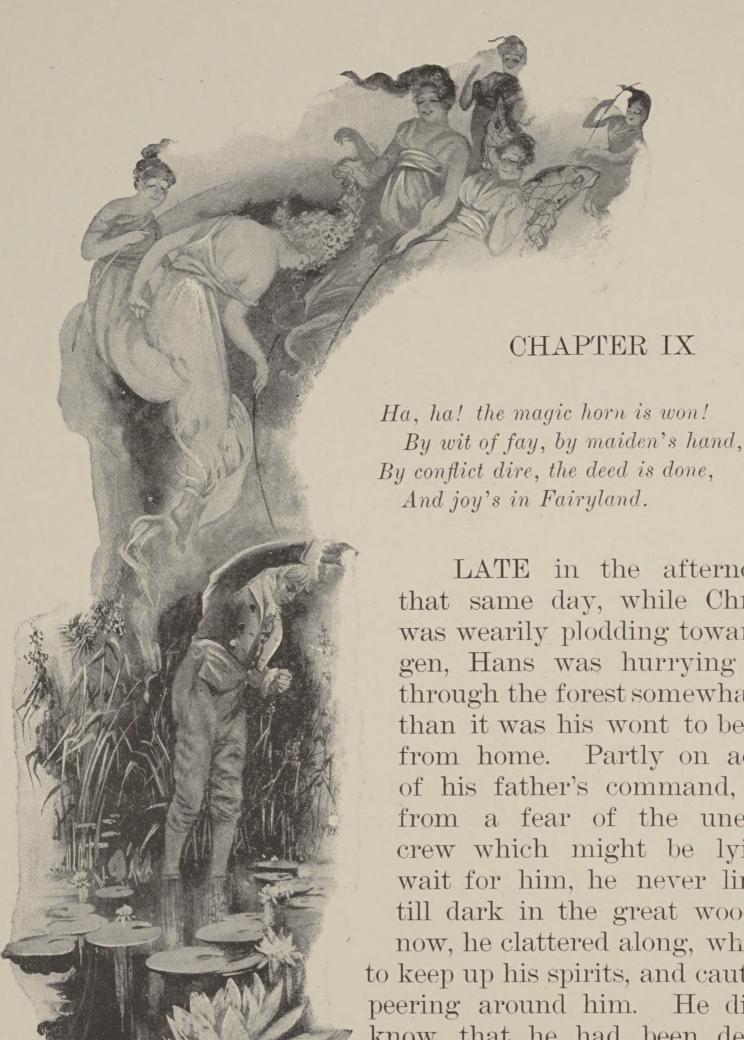
"It is you, Stella Rosa, who must meet Hans before daylight has faded, while Oberon is yet drowsy with sleep. You must persuade him to give you the horn. Surely he cannot resist the goddaughter of Titania."

Stella Rosa smiled as she remembered how all the lads in the

village had been slaves of her bidding since her babyhood.

"I will do my best, dear Fairy godmother," said Stella Rosa, with the happiest smile on her face which had been there since the day she entered Fairyland. "Oh, how grand it is to help make others happy! For that I will, indeed, try to coax the horn from Hans."

"Nimblewit, retire with me, and you, Flight and Gossamer and Lightwing," said Titania. "We must make ready for the struggle."



LATE in the afternoon of that same day, while Christoph was wearily plodding toward Bergen, Hans was hurrying home through the forest somewhat later than it was his wont to be so far from home. Partly on account of his father's command, partly from a fear of the unearthly crew which might be lying in wait for him, he never lingered till dark in the great wood. So now, he clattered along, whistling to keep up his spirits, and cautiously peering around him. He did not know that he had been detained there by the contrivance of that very crew which he hoped to avoid. But Hans alone in the wood at

twilight was not the Hans who, in the cheerful sunlight, had boldly stolen the fairy horn. Then, he could laugh at the fears of Marie. Now, conscience was awake. He had secretly kept the horn, contrary to his father's commands, concealing it under his blouse. But never in any two weeks of his life before had so many mishaps dampened his fun. Fun in abundance he had had, to be sure, but some trouble or other always followed. No sooner had he met a milkmaid in the early morning, and compelled the poor thing to spill all the milk from the brimming pails while she capered around, than a root tripped him up, and his bleeding nose suffered for it; and when the good, stout pastor's wife had been caught by the horn music and danced a lively figure, Hans himself had at once thereafter slipped and sat down with a splash in a hidden pool and afterward been punished for spoiling his best trousers. He was obliged to confess that there might be something in what Marie said after all. Could it be merely chance that he was so often pierced by briars, plunged into bogs, or tormented by sudden gusts of wind which sent him chasing after his cap?

In truth, the fairy horn was becoming a burden. The toy, like every other amusement to an idle mind, had grown stale. If Hans could have met Oberon face to face he would have returned the fairy bugle and begged for mercy. But Oberon he had never beheld again. That wily fairy took good care not to be seen by mortal eyes a second time.

The shadows began to thicken, and Hans was alone in the wood. What is that dark thing in the shadows?—oh, only a stump, of course.

But that tall white creature, that is not a stump!—No, just the trunk of a white birch, after all.

Was it the wind which moved those bushes yonder? But there is not even a breeze stirring.

"Bah! what a chicken I am!" exclaimed Hans. "I wouldn't have Marie know I was scared for the world. Home I must get, or stay out in the forest all night. So here goes."

He started on faster and struck up a lively tune to keep his spirits up. There was a stir in the air about him. He whistled lower, and at last he whistled not at all. And as the whistling died away, his spirits sank to the ground.

"I don't like this very well, I must say. It's rather dark for me to be out alone. What's that noise? Perhaps as Marie said"—

Crash! scratch!

"Preserve us; what's this?"

Hans had plunged headlong into a clump of brambles.

He floundered helplessly around in the dim light, trying to free himself. But as he pulled loose on one side the fierce briars held him fast on the other. First this way, then that, he jerked and tore away from them, only to find that with all his efforts, he was more hopelessly entangled than before.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, as a rent across the sleeve of his jacket warned him to be careful. "What shall I do now? There's a gap in the knee of my trousers, too! Shall I never get out of this?"

Just then, through an opening vista in the forest before him, he saw a figure approaching. As it drew nearer a light seemed to surround it, showing him a girlish form, luminous dark eyes, and flowing hair. Even in his unhappy plight, Hans could not but notice her beauty and grace. Oh, for a convenient gap in the bushes through which he and his rent and disordered clothing might escape from her sight! But Stella Rosa, for it was she, kept on until she paused just in front of him. Hans did not know that, unseen by him, troops of fairies were thronging the forest aisles, headed by their queen. Nor could he see that the tricksy king, Oberon, summoned by his spies, was also hastening near, and that his thronging attendants were pressing the fairies of Titania.

"Rash boy!" said Stella Rosa, "don't struggle with the briars, for you cannot free yourself except by the will of the fairy queen Titania."

"It's a fairy!" murmured Hans.

"No, not a fairy, but a mortal like yourself, only greater in fortune, for I am the goddaughter of the fairy queen. She bids me tell you—"

She paused as she heard a surging in the fairy crew around her. One of Oberon's slyest and most nimble little men had wedged his way in between his foes, and with a spring had landed on a branch above Hans' head, preparing from that vantage ground to seize the horn. One of Titania's fairies, seeing his purpose, had followed him in a trice, and breaking a thorn from the bramble, was with it vigorously prodding the enemy.

"Hasten, Stella Rosa." said Titania, "Oberon is here, and

may defeat us yet."

"Titania bids me say," continued Stella Rosa, "that for fear of other pains and sufferings far greater than these, you must yield to us the horn, so that I may restore it to the fairies. No mortal can long keep a fairy thing."

Hans did not like to appear a coward before this lovely girl.

"The threats of your fairy queen do not frighten me," he replied valiantly, although he was trembling from head to foot. "I have the horn and mean to keep it—until the owner comes and takes it, anyway."

There was a pushing and rustling amid the branches, as if some one was forcing his way through. But Stella Rosa stood

calmly smiling at the boy.

"Hans," she said, and through the fairy light her smile shone with winning radiance, "such boldness is manly! but, good Hans, because you are bold and strong, you will not refuse a favor to me, a girl, who is not bold nor strong, like you? The fairy queen herself would restore the horn to the rightful owner; and she commands me to ask it of you. Think how cruel it would be to keep me from obeying her commands."

"For your sake," replied Hans, "and because you have the sweetest voice girl ever spoke with, I surrender to you the horn." The bewitched Hans raised his arm to take the toy from the cord. "O-ow-oh!" he shrieked as a thorn pierced him sharply, "that is,

I would if I could, but these brambles hold a fellow's arm so tight! Take it, if you can, for I am pinned fast."

Stella Rosa stepped nearer, and lifted the cord from his

head.

And now was the moment of final struggle. By this time, two opposing armies were contending on the branches above them. Oberon, at the outer edge of the circle, watched the strife with rage, and fumed out his orders to the little men nearest Hans. Some of them, in obedience to his commands, swung upon the cord, and linking themselves with a strong phalanx outside, strove to drag it out of Stella Rosa's hands. Titania's followers kept breaking the phalanx, and, circling round Stella Rosa, pushed away the opposing crowds. Then a firm-packed mass dashed suddenly down from above, and were about to pounce upon the horn itself, and carry it off, when one of Titania's champions leaped into the mob and dashing through, covered the horn with her body. Each party, pushing and thronging, strove to drive the other from the field. Fairy spell was opposed to fairy spell, and such deeds of valor were done during those moments, that the two poets-laureate, who repeated the story as it was afterwards told to them (for both were at that time sound asleep far away), each made an epic in which his side, after unheard-of feats, was the undoubted victor.

"Make way for King Oberon!" shouted the herald.

"Back!" said Titania. "Oberon himself shall not approach this place yet. Fairies, I am your queen! Force back these hordes of my angry lord!"

Through all the fairy strife, Stella Rosa had remained calm. Not one of Oberon's crew would lift his hand to harm the gentle maiden.

At last, having severed the chain from the heavy cord, she gave the horn to Titania, who received it with a smile of delight The fairies of Titania set up a shout of victory, but their queen raised her hand.

"At last!" she exclaimed, "and for once, we have gained the

day; let us not humble them further by exulting. Stella Rosa has told us of a better way. Make way, fairies, for your queen."

She passed through the crowd which divided on either side,

until she paused near Oberon.

"Titania," cried Oberon, fuming with rage, "I, your liege lord, command you to give back the bugle which you have stolen!"

"Dear Oberon, my husband," said Titania, "have patience, if you can, and listen to what I would say. At this moment, two lovers are passing through this forest by different ways, who, years ago—long to mortals—were separated by your fairy bugle. To-night, this bugle shall unite them again. But first, this presumptuous Hans shall be punished for his folly; my goddaughter shall hear the merry thing as we dance to this reunion; and then, I promise you, the horn shall be returned. Titania wishes to dispute no more with Oberon, for mortals say it is nobler to forgive."

Oberon, the careless-hearted and light-minded was appeared

by this speech of his queen.

"Let it be as you wish, Titania," he replied. "You have always loved the mortal race, and you are worthy to be indeed a woman. Let us dance to a double reunion then, and after you, I will choose your lovely goddaughter for a partner."

"In good time, my Oberon; but now, I must hasten to bring

all these affairs to a happy ending."

The joyous queen beckoned to one of her fairies.

"Watch this boy, Gossamer, and do not let him stray far from the spot. We have not done with him yet. Come, fairies, away to the magic circle."

Stella Rosa was seized by a horde of fairies, and borne lightly to the place where Titania was hastening. Arriving there, they saw weary Christoph plodding along the way near the spot where wanton Oberon had once led him from the path.

"Here he comes again, the forlorn lover," said the fairy queen.
"But now Titania holds the magic horn, and it shall go hard with us if we cannot restore this seedy and unshorn traveler to the woman he loves."

"Oho!" exclaimed Oberon, "you think he loves her still, then? Let us try his constancy. Let him first see Stella Rosa, and if he

ever thinks of Gertrude again, I'm no fairy."

"I'll give up my scepter if he yields. I have faith in this man, travel-soiled and homely as he is. Come to me, Stella Rosa," and Titania touched her goddaughter with her wand. Stella Rosa's beautiful garments were changed to the clothing of a simple village maiden with rustic cap and long dark braids. She herself appeared as she might when years had brought her to womanhood. By this time, the circle was alight with a thousand fairy lanterns, and Christoph, led by the horn, stumbled on into the brightness. Titania suddenly revealed herself to him.

"Poor weary wayfarer," she said, "here you may rest. I, the Fairy Queen, know your trials, and whom you are seeking. Come, recline awhile upon this couch of moss."

The dazed and bewildered man sank speechless upon the ground.

"You seek Gertrude, your former love, do you not?" continued Titania.

"Kind fairy," said Christoph, as soon as he could speak, "if you know whom I am seeking, perhaps you could give me some tidings of her. For long years I have not seen my little girl. Oh, if you have the power and are kindly disposed to me, lead me to her!"

"You speak as if she were still a girl, young and beautiful," said Titania. "Why, she is no longer either. Come, think no more of her. I will show you a maiden so beautiful you will never find her equal upon earth. Look at her, and forget that one who is now only a faded woman."

"Unkind fairy, malicious like all your race!" exclaimed Christoph. "I want no one but my own Gertrude. Let me go," he

continued, attempting to rise, "I will die seeking her."

"No, perverse man, you cannot stir from this spot without my leave. How do you know but Gertrude has ceased to love you? She may be weary of waiting for you. No, not a word yet. Let me show you the maiden. Stella Rosa, appear!"

As Stella Rosa stepped before him, Christoph gazed upon her

with wonder.

"She is indeed beautiful—more lovely than a dream," he murmured. Suddenly he rose as if to approach her. Then as quickly he turned his back upon her and faced the fairy queen.

"You cannot make me untrue to my first and only love, unkind fairy," he said. "Even if she be weary of waiting and believes me dead, I will be true to the memory of our young days."

"Noble-hearted man!" exclaimed Titania, springing from her mossy seat, "you richly deserve the happiness which will soon be

yours! Farewell!"

She vanished, and the light which had been so bright, suddenly changed to a soft, restful twilight. A chorus of tender voices began to sing:

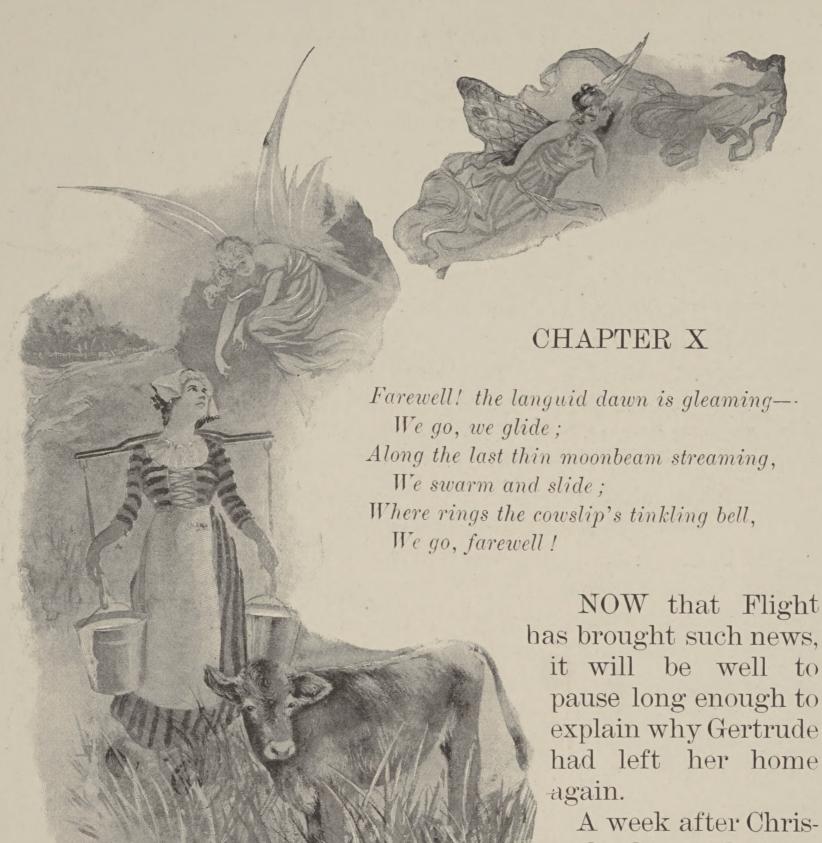
"Weary traveler, cease thy care,
Rest thee in this fairy shade;
Hither, powers of magic rare
Soon shall lead thy faithful maid.
Far from trouble, snares and foes,
Sink in well-deserved repose."

"Ah, how restful this moss looks! said Christoph. "I am so tired, I must lie here awhile. Oh, Gertrude, it seems as if you were not far away;—Good-night, Gertrude," he murmured, as the spell began to work, "I will see you in the morning;" and then he slept.

"Hasten," said Titania, "hasten, Flight, and bring me news

of Gertrude."

Flight soon returned with the tidings that Gertrude was resting at a house on the border of the forest.



A week after Christoph departed from Walden to search for the peddler, Giebel himself entered the

village by another way. There he was told by Fritz of his old friend's return, and of how Christoph had gone to the other side of the forest to seek him.

"Well," said kind-hearted Giebel, "I don't know where to find him, but I can soon see Gertrude, for I am going to the city where she lives. So I believe I'll just make across the plain as fast as

this pack will let me, and tell her to come right to Walden, for Christoph will return some time, I know, and then he will find her here."

Giebel easily persuaded himself that his business required him to go at once to the city where he had met Gertrude; so, without stopping on the way, except for rest and food, he hastened across the plain, knocked at Gertrude's cottage, and found it empty. It was a sore disappointment to the good man.

But he was not long kept in suspense. One of Mother Gertrude's girls, passing at that moment along the street while the peddler stood uncertain, recognized him. She had bought a ribbon of him when he made his former call, and now addressed him. From her he learned that Gertrude had started back to Walden with Miette, over a month before.

Why, then, had she not reached Walden long ago? Had she lost her way again? Was she lying somewhere ill and friendless? There was but one thing to do, and that was to follow in her retreating steps, as Christoph was somewhere following him. He started back again, almost as discouraged as poor Christoph.

If you have sung in a round—the fairies sing them every night to their dances—you will know how bewildered the peddler felt, who was leading. It was, as the cobbler had said, a curious merry-go-round. Christoph was following Giebel, Giebel was following Gertrude, and Gertrude had started for Walden, where she hoped some time to meet Christoph.

"Will they ever meet at this rate?" said the peddler to himself. But he was destined to better fortune than poor Christoph. Just as he entered the pretty village where Gertrude was staying with Miette, he met Gertrude herself face to face.

"Giebel again!" exclaimed Gertrude, joyfully. "Dear Giebel, what news from Walden?"

When Giebel told her that she was righted again in the good opinion and affection of her old friends, that Christoph had appeared, that he was following Giebel himself to get news of Gertrude, her joy knew no bounds.

"I will not wait another day," she said, between smiles and tears. "I have stayed here so long only to please Miette; for she, poor child, was charmed with the place, and so weary with the journey, I had not the heart to take her further for awhile. Now she has found a new friend, a very rich lady "—for so simple Gertrude thought Stella Rosa's mother—"who invites Little Mouse to visit her every day. Yes, I will hasten on to Walden. It will be sweet to some time meet Christoph in the old home where we parted."

But Titania, as we have seen, had other plans for them.

Gertrude left Miette for awhile in the care of Stella Rosa's mother, and set out toward the forest. Arriving there, she stopped for the night with the old fagot-gatherer; but she was restless, and could not sleep. The wind, rustling the leaves outside, seemed calling her to come to them. Instead of going to rest on her hard couch, she stepped out of the door, and paced to and fro before the cottage. The tears came into her eyes as she recalled her child-hood and Christoph—dear, good Christoph, whom she hoped now to meet.

Wrapped in thought, she moved on without thinking where her straying feet were carrying her, until she found she had entered the gloom of the enchanted forest. Then she suddenly paused and looked about her.

"How strange! there is something in the air so stirring, so bewitching, as on that unlucky night—ah!"

A fine voice was singing at her ear:

"Come follow, lady, follow,
Thou canst not choose delay;
No swifter flies the swallow
Than thou shalt tread the way.
Come, lightly trip the forest,
And leave the tiresome plain;
Thy feet shall pause for no rest
Till they find thy love again."

Then upon her ear fell a fine, thin note of music. Not joyous the strain, nor rollicking, as when Oberon had led her astray into sorrow, but so gently, even tenderly, it fell upon her ear, that scarcely knowing she moved at all, she glided after it. So, lightly speeding along, skimming the ground with a swift, smooth motion, she soon neared the place where Christoph was slumbering. Pausing at a distance from where he lay concealed, the horn withdrew, and left her, apparently alone, in amazement at this new wonder.

"Truly, I wish I had not tried to go through this bewitched forest again. Alone this time, with not even my poor grand-mother to keep my courage up, what new trick will be played upon me, "till I find my love again"? What can it mean? I hope it is not a snare to lead me into danger. Well, I am safe for the present, at any rate, and I will wait without terror until something else happens."

happens."

"Now," said Titania, "the next scene in this night's entertainment shall be for my lord Oberon's special delight. Gossamer, lead that venturesome boy, Hans, to our presence. Now, my Oberon, you may visit upon this hapless wight any punishment you think fit."

"A taste of his own sport would be most to my mind. Let

him have his fill of my dainty horn."

"Come, fairies, away then. Now throng the forest aisles, good people, and wing it as swiftly and rollickingly as you will; and you, Stella Rosa, shall recline here until our return, and then for a merry round with my jovial lord. Take the horn, Nimblewit, to you belongs the honor of this dance. Up, sprites, away!"

Unlucky Hans! rash, disobedient boy! Plodding through the uncertain light, he comes doubtfully onward, bewildered and trembling, when out rings the music of the fairy horn in merry fury. Off he goes, the countless fairy troop thickening the very air about his head. Round and round in maddening whirls, circles within circles, windings of curious maze, they lead the stumbling lad. In and out among the tree clumps they flash. He sings, he shouts, and tosses up his arms. Trembling along the margin of

shadowy lakes, up and down seemingly endless hillocks, deep in lonely vales, Hans presses on after the ever receding horn, nor may he pause, except as Nimblewit pauses for new breath. As time speeds on, faster and more furious grows the fun. Now his hair stands on end, as in a dismal glen, he meets the awesome "foxfire," ghostly dweller of the wood. Then tearing through the copse, the yawning rents in his already tortured clothes testify to the strength of the brambles. A moment more, sunk in the watery bog up to the waist, he splashes and struggles in vain efforts to escape, until soaked from head to foot; but escape he must and tries to, only to rush into new toils. Next, up a steep incline he plunges along, the whirling fairies singing gibes and jests about his head. Hark! the troop breaks into a chorus:

"Blow, blow the fairy horn,
Dance, dance o'er the green,
Tripped by root and caught by thorn,
Sunk in marsh-damp all forlorn,
Sorrier wight was never seen.
Fairies, wheel your airy flight,
Lead him on with bugle gay,
Merrier will he never trip,
E'en upon his wedding day!"

Now the dancers as they whirl along, again approach Stella Rosa. Hans has long ago forgotten to laugh. Even the horn music can wring no more shouts from him. His whole body a rack of pain, his clothing soaked tatters, his manliness forgotten, he cares not for the bright eyes of Stella Rosa, he does not even see her, as he limps past, sobbing, breathless, exhausted. Stella Rosa at sight of him, also bursts into tears, and throws herself before the fairy queen.

"Dear Queen," she sobs, "Do not, oh, do not punish him any more! Surely, he has suffered too much already."

"What say you, my Oberon," says Titania, "is it not enough?"

"Enough, my lovely queen," responds the king, whom the sport has put in high good humor, "I think he has had all the fun he will need for another fortnight; and as for the dance, ha, ha, ha! Nimblewit handles the horn as well as I might, myself! good Nimblewit, it is a rare night, indeed!"

At these words, Nimblewit forgets his grudge against the king,

and becomes again his ardent admirer.

"The young hours of the new day are growing long," said Titania, "lead him to the place where Gertrude is sleeping."

The panting Hans drops prone upon the sward.

"The black imps seize that horn!" he gasps, as soon as he recovers breath. "May I never see the unlucky thing, nor any of its kind again!"

"Ah, ah, ah!" sings a chorus of voices at his ear.

"He hopes he ne'er may hear again
The magic bugle ring,
Such sports as these he will forego,
Nor touch a fairy thing.
Oh, no! no, no, no!
Nor hear a fairy sing."

Chorus responding at a distance:

"Oh, no! no, no, no!

Nor hear the bugle ring."

Gertrude, who had dropped into quiet slumber, was not roused by the song nor the horn, whose music had shrunk to a thin note, almost too delicate for mortal ear. The chorus again murmured softly:

> "Speed well the easy task, good Hans, The fairies bid you do, Lead out these way-worn lovers here, And then farewell to you."

"Now for our own dance," said Titania.

Oberon seized Stella Rosa, Titania gave her hand to Nimblewit, and they were soon circling away as madly as only fairies might, who through the livelong night had been tripping a measure. But ere long, an airy form sprang into the circle, and fell at the feet of Oberon.

"For me, also, Master, is there not some sport for me?"

"Puck!" exclaimed all Fairyland at a breath, and the dancing ceased.

"My Oberon," said Titania, "will you not forgive your agile Puck on a night when all is harmony but for this unhappy one?"

Now as Oberon was secretly delighted at the chance of taking back his follower, who had been his dearest crony and the fittest companion for his sportive spirit, this matter was soon settled.

"The time draws near for the second cock-crowing," said

Titania. "What shall we do until then?"

Fitful Oberon was in a softened mood.

"Let us have a fairy wedding," he said.

"A fairy wedding?" said Titania, "with all my heart! There has been no wedding in Fairyland since you and I, dear Oberon—But who is there to wed? Few fairies, you know—"

But to the amazement of all Fairyland, Puck at this moment sprang to Eglantine, and drawing her into the circle, knelt with her before the king and queen.

"Master, we loved each other before Fairyland was divided. She went with her queen, I stayed with my king. Shall not we have a wedding now?" The king took Eglantine's hand, and the queen took Puck's. After they had joined them, all the encircled fairies danced around them and, flying near, threw kisses to the united pair.

"Puck shall dance with me a parting round," said Titania, "and you, my lord, lead off with Eglantine, and then we will away, before my Stella Rosa's white eyelids droop, until they shut in her starlit eyes."

"Agreed," replied Oberon, "for dawn is breaking, and my

white eyelids are already drooping."

"But one moment, dear Oberon," said Titania, when the dance was finished. "We have had a fairy wedding; and now will you give your free consent to the union of these mortal lovers whom once you separated?"

"Consent? ha, ha! when all the doings of the night have led everything straight to the fulfilment of this desire of yours, Oberon has little left to do except to give consent. However, if you wish for more, kindly lend me the horn, good Nimblewit. I

will return it to you, my queen."

Oberon, taking the horn, led the way to sleeping Christoph. Flying round the slumberer in ever narrowing circles, his roguish face lit up with a smiling humor which Titania thought enchanting, and which made her love him even better than before, Oberon blew out a soft lively tinkling tune at Christoph's ear.

"I'll start this ancient lover to his new courting," he said.

Just then, Pugpippin, so mad with merriment that he had been perching with one foot on the coachman's seat, while he leaned far over the ponies and shook the reins about their ears, drew the coach up at Stella Rosa's side. The maiden sprang in, while the laughing fairies prepared to skip and fly.

"One more chorus," said Titania, leading the way with

Oberon.

"One round, one long mad round again,
Oh, morn, come not too soon,
"O'er couch of cloud yet lingering wait,
O sprite-belovéd moon!"

Repeating softly, and yet more softly the refrain, they whirled away, while the distant echo, in a fine, thin voice, replied:

"Oh, sprite-belovéd moon!"

And the forest was left to its human occupants until another night.

As if in response to the echo, at this moment, Gertrude awoke.

The dawn was bright enough to clearly reveal Hans, as he sat

near her, leaning against the trunk of a tree.

This is not the love I have been seeking," she said to herself with a smile at his woe-begone appearance. "The fairies have not kept their promise. Good lad," she continued, as she rose, "are you lost, like me, in this strange forest? I have been led here by a power I could not resist, which seems to haunt the place, to the confusion of travelers. Twice I have heard it. I am tired, bewildered, lost. Can you tell me how to find my way out, away from the magic of that terrible horn?"

"Plague on the horn!" Hans burst forth; "it has served me worse than you. See where the briars have torn my clothes, and my shoes, too, soaked with water, and worn through the soles. How I wish I had never seen or heard the tormenting

thing!"

"Poor boy! You are certainly in a worse plight than I. But you say you have *seen* it, which I have never done. Is that why

you have fared so badly?"

"Never mind that," said Hans, fidgeting about uneasily. He disliked to confess having brought upon himself his present sad plight by taking and using the horn. "One thing is certain, I am not fit to be seen; if you won't look at my jacket and trousers—"

"I can easily pardon your mishaps, as I have suffered myself; but if you can show me the way out of this place, good boy, it

shall be my first care to mend those sad-looking garments."

"Oh, my mother will mend the clothes; but indeed, I would lead you out gladly, only that tormenting horn has muddled my head so that I could not find my way in this dim light."

"Well, the morning grows brighter every moment. Look!

isn't some one moving there among the trees?"

"Yes, it seems to be a man, and he is coming this way."

"Some traveler, perhaps, bewildered like us. What a strange night this has been!"

Christoph, for he it was, as soon as he saw them, drew nearer.

"If you are about to leave this place, would you kindly show

me the way out? I was led from my path last night, and over-

come by weariness, fell asleep. Now I am lost, and—"

During this speech, Gertrude had risen, and stood faltering in bewildered joy, for although time had so changed him in other ways, Christoph's voice she recognized at once. Then the fairy's promise flashed across her mind: "Till they find thy love again." Before he stopped speaking, all doubt had ceased—she knew that here, indeed, was her long-lost friend. She took two steps forward, paused timidly, murmured:

"Christoph!"

"Gertrude!" exclaimed Christoph.

"The hermit!" cried Hans, all in a breath. The next moment she was sobbing on Christoph's shoulder, while Hansstood by in open-eyed wonder, not unmingled with scorn. He began to be impatient before the lovers grew calm again.

"But how came you here, Gertrude?" asked Christoph, after

awhile.

"Giebel, the peddler, told me you were looking for me, and I started at once to go back to dear old Walden, when——"

"Giebel!" interrupted Christoph, "how did he know anything about it? Here I have been scouring the plain and forest over for him, to ask about you, when last night—"

"That plaguy horn led us all a pretty jig!" broke in Hans. But if you want me to show you the way out of this beastly place,

I'd like to have you start soon, for I am hungry."

"True," said Gertrude, "and we are all tired. See! the sun is glimmering with straight beams between the tree trunks. We can talk as we go."

"Yes, let us hasten," said Christoph, drawing Gertrude's arm within his own. When they were fairly on the way, Christoph for the first time had leisure to look more closely at their guide. Suddenly he said:

"But who is this? Didn't I see you, my lad, a fortnight ago, before my cottage? Wasn't it you who blew upon the horn?" Hans blushed, stammered, and finally confessed the pranks he

had been playing for the last two weeks. His listeners made joyful their reunion, laughed heartily at the tale, and Christoph easily forgave the trick that had restored his disturbed mental powers. So talking eagerly of their various adventures, they arrived at the forester's house.

When Hans opened the door, he was met by Marie, who shrieked as if she had seen a ghost. The mother ran hither, the father followed. They had been awake all night, searching for their straying boy. There was a marvelous tale to tell. For awhile, all talked at once. It took long to disentangle the straight thread of the story. The mother, with joyous tears, insisted that Christoph was her son's preserver; he vainly asserting that, on the contrary, Hans had been his preserver.

The father broke in:

"But at any rate, you and your good wife have brought our son safely to his home——"

At which Gertrude blushed and tried to speak, but could not. Finally, Christoph, begging them all to listen, explained their situation. He told of their childhood—their betrothal—of how they had been separated, and that only this morning they had met again.

"And now," added Christoph, "we must be married to-day, for I cannot think of being separated from her again."

The good forester's wife, delighted to have a wedding in her house, bustled about and hurried the maids until they had placed before the guests an abundant breakfast. Then came the pastor, and with his blessing, the Hermit of the Lonely Glen became a joyful bridegroom, and Mother Gertrude a happy bride.

Then they returned to Walden.

The forester, however, had been so pleased with Christoph, that he sent for them to come and live near him, that he might employ Christoph in the care of the forest.

They found that the hut where Christoph had lived so long alone, could be enlarged into a charming cottage. To the cottage,

therefore, went Christoph and Gertrude to live. As they entered the door, Christoph said:

"What a pity, dear Gertrude, that the rose vine has shed all its blossoms! I wish it was covered with roses to welcome you!"

But Gertrude stopped, and lifting the fallen branch which struck against the door, found one late rose upon it.

"See," she said, as she propped the branch neatly against the wall, "one rose to welcome me! and many, many more through the long years!"

With them, of course, came dear little Miette to be their own daughter; and Christoph filled as well the place of the lost father as Gertrude had for so many years taken Elsie's place to the motherless child.

And who, do you suppose, brought to them the needful house furnishings, and the dainty trifles of dress which made Gertrude look young and sweet in Christoph's eyes? Who, but old Giebel? For a few years yet, he carried his pack through the forest, where he knew a warm corner was always waiting for him at Gertrude's fireside.

As for Hans, he became so fond of Gertrude that he spent most of his idle hours (which at first were many) at the cottage. But as time wore on, he learned from Christoph's energy and industry to be ashamed of his faults, and gradually became a comfort to his father's declining years.

And Stella Rosa? When she woke from a long, deep sleep after that dawn in which Christoph and Gertrude found each other, she was lying on the pretty couch in her own sweet room at her mother's cottage. How she came there, she never knew, although Queen Titania could have told her, or perhaps her mother, or even I.

Miette often visited her there; there she grew to womanhood, and—but it would take another story to relate all that happened to Stella Rosa before she met the prince and was married and made queen of her husband's dominions. If I should come back

again—but that is as Titania wills; well, well, we are growing old—but if I should return, then I will tell her story.

And how long did little Miette brighten the woodland cottage with her quiet ways? Hans could have told you. When he grew to be a man, he did not need to go farther than the cot in the forest to find him a bride; why should he, when there under the rose vine stood the gentlest and sweetest maiden in all the forest

country—darling, dainty, little Miette?

Titania was willing to give up her darling godchild after Oberon and she became united again. She kept her word and restored the horn to Oberon, who, to please her, promised that he would never use it again for the distress of mortals; but, sly fellow, he was ever on the watch, and when he found Christoph a little vexed, or Gertrude somewhat sad—both being but human—he felt at liberty to give a gentle blast, which soon brought the smiles to their faces, and the merriment to their hearts.

Gertrude, when she saw her two babies smiling in the cradle, would say:

"They are listening to the horn!"

Or Christoph, when his lambs skipped about the tiny meadow, would laugh and exclaim:

"The horn, the horn! let them dance if they will, but good Fairy King, spare me!" And Oberon was kind. Even Hans after awhile could hear the horn spoken of without a blush or a frown; could relate his exploits to Miette; and could even enjoy a gentle caper when Oberon was near, and be all the better for it. None of them, therefore, ever again had reason to be aught but thankful for

## THE FAIRY HORN OF OBERON.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The gray dawn of a winter morning steals through my window, and the white ashes lie dead in the grate. Gone are the visions of the fire. Where are Oberon and Titania, Puck and Nimblewit? Where, oh where is Mikterenos? Only a scarlet bow

which I pick up from the floor, and which I am sure I saw upon her staff, speaks of her presence. To be sure, Sylvia curls her red upper-lip and declares it is the very bow which she lost from her hair last night, but what care I? She was not visited by Mikterenos, nor chosen to hear her latest story.

Farewell, Mikterenos! Farewell, Oberon and Titania! You have gone upon your long journey—The forest aisles are no more througed with airy figures; the mountain glens are forsaken. Forsaken, did I say? Not while there is still a path of moonbeams through the calm ether; while the rose wafts out her fragrance through the midsummer nights; while a warm chimney corner and an idle dreamer invite them hither; while Childhood opens its doors and calls them in with shouts and hand-clapping. While these endure, the happy horn shall keep the child-heart beating all over the world.

THE END.

Mes, our children are delighted with Baby Goose. It is published by Laird and Lee, of Chicago.

